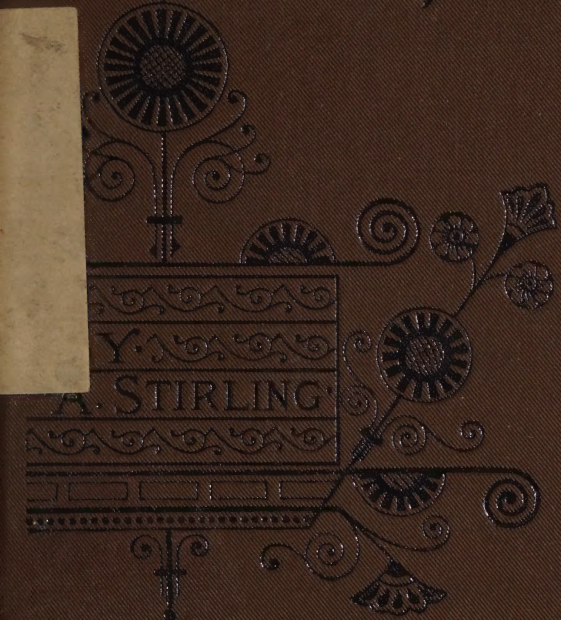
AT DAYBREAK



A. STIRLING

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AT DAYBREAK

A NOVEL

BY A. STIRLING

BOSTON
JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY
1884

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AT DAYBREAK.

CHAPTER I.

BETTY.

THE afternoon shadows of the great elm-branches swung drowsily on the gravel-path. The air was filled with a faintly murmurous rhythm, accounted for by frequent sallies, across the warm sand, of the small black-mailed insect who contributes in his grassy retirement to that sweet September hum. From some invisible height a sharp, plaintive note descended: the voice of the bird known to some country-folk as the "hot-bird."

There were plenty of trees and lilac-bushes helping to shade the wide brick house-front with its cheerful-looking awnings; but a still heat had gathered even under that green protection. The stone animals guarding the base of the steps felt quite warm as you put your hand on their vine-wreathed flanks: the sun had been trying their patience severely that day. So Betty thought, as she sat on the steps where the shade was deepest: a little idle

figure, with a long flaxen braid following the convexity of its little spine, its elbows planted on its knees, its round chin propped at a disconsolate slant in the hollows of its hands.

She was staring at the stone lions just then, and thinking sympathetically that there was something very thirsty in the persistent loll of their granite tongues. It moved her to that extent presently that she came down off the steps and got a sprinkler from the grass-plat, and under pretence of watering the vines poured such a libation between the patient jaws that it should have relaxed their piteous gape. It did not, all the same; but Betty felt easier as she returned to her shady spot on the flight of steps. She was quite advanced in years — over eight of them; but the carved lions were old playmates of hers, and always seemed to have more life in them than most carved lions.

She sat down again, in the same attitude as before, giving a sigh that was almost a grown-up sigh for volume. The honeysuckle clinging around the porch was letting its last flowers drift helplessly over the steps, as though it were really no use in life to keep up one's extra adornments in such very warm weather. Betty swept up a few of the wrinkled blossoms in her hand, and looked regretfully at the vine. She was in a susceptible mood this afternoon, it seemed; more so than usual, though she was always a tender and imaginative little maiden. But trouble often increases one's sensibility, even in small matters — and Betty had an immense trouble! It was the first time

she ever had one, anything like so large; its weight, combined with the heat of the day, took the spring altogether out of her elastic little feet.

Axel was gone away! Axel was only a brown-eyed urchin in a Scotch cap and "monkey-jacket;" but in Betty's estimation, as he bounced into the half-filled coach at his father's door to ride to the railway, he was by far the most important factor of the load.

Betty could not remember a time when she and Axel had not played together. She was the younger by several years; but there were hardly any boys in the vicinity, and anyhow Axel did not like rough boys. Not that he was a "girl-boy" in the least; but from his frock-days up he had shown a calm superiority to the common types of infancy — a sort of gentlemanly disdain for the squabbling, tumbling enjoyments of the average boy. The same exclusive taste led him to make a comrade of the ladylike wee Betty, all the more that there were no ill-mannered infants near by to make fun of him for it. He could not forbear domineering over her a little; but that was perfectly acceptable to Betty. She would prefer being ordered around by Axel to being slaved for by any other boy in the neighborhood; indeed, she took no interest in any other boy.

There was a strong tie of intimacy between the children's families. They had lived for many years on adjacent land, and both of them in houses which might well be called old homesteads by this time, though additions and improvements had taken place

in them year by year. Betty's home had seen the less remodelling of the two. It had not been changed at all, within her short recollection: the same vines curled, summer after summer, around the same stone window-ledges; the same huge lilac-bushes flowered, summer after summer, on either side of the long flight of steps; the same broad brick house-front reddened in the sun. They seemed to be the same chip-sparrows, too, that sat in sociable, vacillating rows on the slopes of the small dormer-windows, year by year, tipping their brown heads to look at Betty bringing crumbs to scatter on the grass. Christina, the older sister, used to toss up twigs at them, to see them flutter off and circle through the trees in a panic; but Christina had been away from home for two or three years now, and Betty and the chip-birds had it all their own peaceful way.

Axel never made targets of the birds; he was too kind-hearted for that. He used sometimes to get angry at Christina for such cruel diversions. The young lady was several years older than Axel; she did not worry herself much then about his opinion of her.

She was rather a difficult child to get on with generally — "peculiar," her mother said. Tenderness seemed to have been left out of her composition, so far as the family were able to discover. As long as she reigned alone in the Karlsen nursery she treated her subjects with fluctuating favor; but when a new claimant to the throne appeared, Christina abdicated with great readiness. They set it down to her credit

that she never seemed jealous of Betty. For the rest, she was variable, she was wilful, she could never be coaxed into more than a fleeting show of fondness for anybody but through the medium of presents, in respect to which she showed an abnormal degree of calculation. The family felt, on the whole, a certain relief when Aunt Bertha Karlsen, the rich Uncle Caspar's widow, carried off Christina, at twelve years of age, for an unlimited visit at her house in the city.

Aunt Bertha, as they called her, had never visited her brother-in-law's family until Betty her namesake was entering her second year. She was an American lady, pronounced to be fine-looking, and certainly singular. Her relatives had never suspected her of any great attachment to them; indeed, her correspondence with them had been so scanty that she knew almost nothing of the family census beyond the existence of a small Bertha, which last fact was rather gratifying to her.

Having no children of her own, and perhaps getting a trifle lonesome in the midst of splendors, Aunt Bertha, moved by one of her sudden fancies, bought a gold mug and rushed off to Lyme to make the acquaintance of her niece.

Betty as an infant was good-nature in person; so there was dismay among the retainers when her babyship, on the introduction of Aunt Bertha and the gold mug into the nursery, pulled a wry face and showed signs of open dissatisfaction. Brought into contact with her aunt's stiff silks the namesake wept

bitterly — even directing a kick of hostility against the influential visitor. The mug, with a funny image on the handle, availed nothing.

"My niece appears to have a somewhat irritable disposition," observed Aunt Bertha, with a piqued air.

At this point Christina, in a white frock, appeared at the nursery door, fluttering about on her tiptoes and looking at the handsome strange lady.

"Bless me, Letitia, what little spirit is this? Not your child? What! is there another one?" said the lady to her brother's wife, staring at the older niece.

Christina was excessively pretty; and Aunt Karlsen was very susceptible to beauty. She flattered herself by finding an image of her younger self in this blooming child's face. Christina advanced with her little assured step, attracted partly by her aunt's admiring look, partly by the large and gleaming pendants on that lady's lace-ruffled neck; and submitted her blonde curls to be stroked with perfect confidence.

"What a charming face and what a responsive temperament!" said Aunt Karlsen, delighted. "Should you like a wax-doll, my dear, with joints? or would you rather have a walking-doll and a trousseau from Colifichet's?"

Betty got the mug; but Christina got the doll and Aunt Karlsen's heart, and many a subsequent gift of more appreciable value. And in the course of a few years the lady made her second visit, and found no great difficulty in getting possession of the favored niece for an indefinite period.

Betty missed her sister very little; she thought of her occasionally with a comfortable sense of safety from teasing, which was altogether a novelty. Axel Brand, her playfellow from "down the road," was a much more sympathetic comrade.

And now at last, there was Axel gone: and desolation and emptiness had settled down upon the alleys and arbors of the sunny old garden. The small Ariadne, sitting forlorn in her tear-moistened pinafore, retired into the past with quite a mature fervor of sentiment. She went over the various scenes in which the brown eyes and monkey-jacket had figured.

Now it is a spring-wandering in the woodlands: they have discovered the prettiest little torrent, swishing down a hillside, lit up with broken sunlight through the birches. "Sit down there, Betty, and keep the sun off my face!" commands Axel the Great Caliph, stretching out regally on the moss. Betty obeys with meekness. She knows he will take occasion to tell her some wonderful bit out of the Arabian Nights; and whether he does or not, what diversion could be more grateful than to sit and keep the sun off Axel's face?

Now it is a lovely white Christmas, snow-hushed and mysterious, fragrant indoors with mignonette and roses, and with the sweeter breath of fir and the waxy scent of candles. And in the evening they hear voices carolling softly in the starlit garden: and Axel pulls her to the window, and they look down and see a group of shadowy choristers standing out

by the whitened hedges. Then the singers are brought in — a party from the village; and there is so much talking and laughing, and clicking of glasses and dancing of wax-lights, that Betty's head grows quite heavy, and without her knowledge the brilliant evening merges itself into next morning.

Again it is a birthday — her birthday; and Axel comes whistling across lots to bring her a basket of his favorite white clethra. Actually Betty is precocious enough — remembering that basket of clethra — to wish that she had kept some of the fragrant spikes, and flattened them in a book, for souvenirs.

"Axel will come back next summer, after his school is over," she reminds herself, trying to regard that as a bit of consolation. But she is not so old yet that ten months do not stretch out before her like a Great Desert of time, too immense for her small mind to span.

"Betty, where are you?" says her mother's voice, floating down from an upper window.

"On the doorstep," Betty answers, rising slowly and coming up into the sunlight.

"Why, Betty Karlsen, where did you find that little old frock? and what induced you to put those black ribbons on your hair? What notion has crept into your head now, you foolish child?"

For Betty, with a funny little feeling that sable was most appropriate to this melancholy day, had hunted up a black frock from some remote closet, and invested herself with it; and had also fished out some knots of black ribbon from a chaotic bonnet-

box, and tied the same on her flaxen braid and on the neck of her pinafore.

"Is it any harm?" she says, irresolute, and looking up honestly with big, rounded, questioning eyes. "I put them on, you know, because he was going away. I did n't think it would be any harm."

Mrs. Karlsen took her head in with a silent laugh. She always humored the child's fancies, and never showed it if they amused her.

Betty went off mutely by herself, and nestled over a book in the dim library. She had happened right upon a story which was one of Axel's favorites, and which they both knew by heart. It was about a Prince who rode out into the world for adventures; and who had such a hard time of it, between dragons and magicians, that he never came home again till his hair was gray. But his Princess, in order to preserve her youth till his return, shut herself up in her tower to sleep; and would not be waked until the Prince himself climbed the tower-stair and dropped his shield at her feet. This story they called "Princess Faithful."

"Axel has gone out into the world, too," said Betty; and she read the old story through again, while more than one sprinkle of reminiscence fell on the black ribbons of the little pinafore.

CHAPTER II.

TRANSPLANTED.

THREE generations had been recorded since Jens Karlsen, a fair-haired and gray-eyed young man, travelled away from Jutland and sailed over seas to America. No courtiers nor long-titled gentlemen were among Betty's ancestors; the original Jens was a tough-sinewed farmer's son, though an intelligent and well-informed one.

As the transplanted family of Karlsen grew and multiplied, it was steadily favored in its temporal affairs; whether by luck, or as a result of Northern muscle and diligence, the descendants were not moved to inquire. By the time that the odd little name, bequeathed by father to son, had worked itself around to *John*, it had become the property of a most American-looking gentleman, who retained no trace of his origin except his blonde beard, his patronymic, and a mild interest in the jagged little tongue of land which sheltered his forefathers.

This John Karlsen, at the age of twenty-seven, being in some sort a gentleman of leisure, with a good education, made extended tours in the Old World; whence he finally brought back, as Mrs. Karlsen, a fair and refined young person of Eng-

lish parentage. Mrs. Karlsen had been in course of preparation for a less retired career — that of a professional vocalist, in fact. She had fine musical gifts, and might have won a famous place among artists. But John Karlsen was extremely happy that she had not yet undertaken her public training when he made her acquaintance. He congratulated himself that her experience had been confined to musicales in somebody's drawing-rooms under her master's auspices. He respected the art, but was sensitive about publicity for the lady whom he was about to distinguish. He was as proud as though Jens Karlsen of that early generation had come of blood royal instead of solid Jutland farmer-stock.

So he hastened to carry off the young lady, as it were Iphigeneia from the sacrifice; and brought her home to America, having impressed upon her that she was never to employ her talent but for his own pleasure and that of his friends. The injunction was needless; directly on leaving England some unaccountable cold or other malady made short work of her beautiful voice, to her very bitter regret indeed. She sang no more, except that sometimes she tried the sweet remains of her voice for her own wistful pleasure, and for the entertainment of the little sovereigns Christina and Betty.

People who knew the Karlsens often wondered how it was that they were satisfied to keep on with their quiet life in Lyme. A few who knew them better understood perfectly how the sweet, romantic air of the pretty village, and especially their own

retired home among the trees, suited the somewhat poetic taste of the couple.

There was still another attraction for Mr. Karlsen at Lyme. He was a man of very warm attachment to the limited number whom he called his friends; and one of that number had been for years resident on land adjoining the Karlsen property. Dr. Brand showed externally still less of the Scandinavian than his friend Karlsen; notwithstanding that his relations with the Kattegat were much closer than the latter gentleman's. It was the discovery of their common origin that first drew the two together, when they met as young men, Harold Brand having just returned with his degree from Copenhagen.

"My father went there before me," he explained to Karlsen; "it 's only natural he should want me to finish off at his Alma Mater. One may as well go to Copenhagen as anywhere else. I learned to be very fond of it, too. When I went over to Denmark I thought I was going out of the world, you know; but it 's a charming land, let me tell you! I would really have liked to settle there, but that the family is grafted in America, and it would be a bad thing to break one's self off. I shall always regret Denmark. Is it possible you 've never been there, Karlsen?"

No, he had never been there, and never cared very much about going, though he felt some natural interest in the country.

Brand, American-born as he was, declared that nothing would ever destroy his awakened and innate passion for old Dania; and so, indeed, he remained,

ardent Dane to the last day of his life. Karlsen admired the dark-eyed young patriot, and wondered at him, unable to sympathize very deeply with his enthusiasm.

"I could get enthusiastic about *you*, Harold," he sometimes said, smiling at his friend and approving his eloquence more readily than its theme. "But an old Norse fellow like you has no business with those stunning black eyes. If you had my pale phiz, now, it would seem more the thing for you to be singing runes and telling legends and all that."

"Oh, there are plenty of dark phizzes in Denmark," Brand said. "I remember one section where you could all but fancy yourself in some Spanish village, just by looking at the 'midnight eyes' in the roads and windows."

It was easy to like Dr. Brand. He had a fine engaging face, beautiful eyes, a broad, active figure, and the most perfect address in the world, people were apt to say.

"If Providence had seen fit to make you a rascal," Karlsen once remarked to him, contemplatively, "you might have been the most successful rascal that ever beguiled mankind!"

This compliment Brand received in all simplicity, with a laugh that certainly no rascal could have achieved.

He bought the house and land bordering on the Karlsen homestead; and told his friend: "If I ever marry, I'll come out here and run up the Danish flag, and establish my Penates under its folds."

Karlsen was delighted with the promise. He was so far under the other's influence as to decide on giving his first daughter a name from the land of her grandfathers; and recalling the royal name of Christian as prominent in Dr. Brand's historical sketches, it seemed to him that the derivative Christina would have rather a pretty and dignified effect. So, one Sunday morning the small nameless one was borne into the village church, and came out Christina Karlsen, blinking quietly on the nurse's shoulder.

Christina's papa reported complacently to Dr. Brand; and was quite vexed when Brand told him in amused deprecation to read his Danish history, and see what an ineligible name he had pitched upon for the little maid.

"Well, I can't help it now," said the crestfallen papa. "I hope it won't hurt her."

By and by Dr. Brand married a pretty Philadelphian with brown-velvet eyes and a spirit of truly old-fashioned devotion to "her Harold." They came, according to promise, and set up their Penates within a stone's throw of the Karlsen limits. Dr. Brand took the first step toward household equipment by erecting a flag-pole on his roof and letting fly the "Dannebrog;" which afterwards caused great perplexity to such villagers and wayfarers as beheld the flap of the mysterious scarlet ensign from the high-road.

The interior of his house bore equal witness to his patriotism. As one entered the hall a head of Bertel Thorvaldsen looked down in marble from a con-

spicuous niche. At right and left were stationed large casts from the master's works, which little Betty's soft gray eyes studied with wonder in after years, ranging through the house under Axel's lead.

One half of the Doctor's library was devoted to Scandinavian literature; the shelves were topped by busts and medallions of compatriot authors; and over one alcove, where the children often loitered, the head of gentle Andersen rose in kindly abstraction. The Doctor, finding them there looking at it, would tell over anecdotes from the good man's treasury, and sometimes repeat his pretty history of the boy Bertel; afterwards calling them out into the hall and making them admire the great head of the genius grown a man. Thorvaldsen was one of the Doctor's idols. Little Axel himself was always put to sleep under a copy of the beautiful "Night," ever flying with drowsy wings and poppy-wreathed forehead.

Now and then they brought Betty in to take dinner with them, which was a high privilege to her. She looked with silent gratification around the large dining-room, where everything seemed to be made of polished wood except the heavy-framed paintings; at Dr. Brand's dark-whiskered face, smiling jovially over the red and yellow decanters and little twinkling glasses; at Axel, sitting up very gentlemanlike behind his own diminutive tankard with a carved lid. She tasted daintily of awe-inspiring dishes, and of a miraculous red jelly which Mrs. Brand called by some heathenish name, and praised as a favorite dish

in the Doctor's country. And when they left the table her eyes always wandered to the great dark buffet set out with strange-shaped glass and a singular figure of a knight on a charger, who was susceptible of being lifted off and resolving himself into a cup-lid.

"See there! How the race has dwindled!" the Doctor would say, stopping before it. "Look at that hunting-cup — its original belonged to one of the greatest kings of Denmark, who used to fill and empty it in a breath! Let a Dane of the present day try that feat!"

The "hunting-cup" was a huge and curious structure, all repoussé-work, which he had seen among the treasures of a castle and managed to get tolerably copied for himself, at great expense. It was said to accommodate the amount of two bottlesful, which the thirsty sovereign, according to tradition, used to absorb at a gulp.

"I don't believe that, you know," Axel remarked aside, without any irreverence. "My father believes it, but I don't. Not unless those old kings were regular giants; and I think that 's not very likely."

Betty thought so, too; but looking after the Doctor's handsome head, which she admired much more than Thorvaldsen's, as it receded into his library, she delicately refrained from admitting the doubt.

In the unlucky days when Dr. Brand had sent her playfellow into the city to school, those marble heads and figures were something of a solace to Betty.

She never missed paying them her respects, on her visits to Mrs. Brand, before going up to the sitting-room above. The kind lady would be oftenest found in that smaller room next her own, where the little bas-relief of "Night" glimmered like a white moon on the wall. Her brown eyes always smiled up in welcome, though sometimes with lately-moistened lashes, at sight of the small inquiring face presented in her doorway. She was ever ready to give to the last particular the latest-received news of Axel: how he was staying with distant relatives in the city; how kind they were to him, and how he had entirely gotten over being homesick (at which Betty secretly felt hurt); how much there was to see in town, and how "awfully jolly" it all was — which phrase his mamma marvelled at, and feared he had been brought into contact with some undesirable street-urchins. And — as an afterthought — the absent one mentioned that his standing at school was very good; which indeed was confirmed by reports from his teachers to the pleased Doctor.

It was a joyful day when Mrs. Brand could announce his first vacation-time. Betty ran down the long gravel-walk to look, whenever a coach was heard rumbling, all that day and the next. Mrs. Brand, sewing and waiting by the little casement of Axel's room, smiled as she caught glimpses of the yellow braid flying between the trees. The braid resolved itself into its strands on the twelfth trip, and blew into a cloud around Betty's disappointed face.

"I suppose," sighed the quaint maiden to herself, "that I must learn a lesson of patience!"

And she returned slowly and mounted on one of her stone lions, looking, as she sat up with the flaxen shower around her straight little figure, like a miniature Una in a revery.

"*How-do-you-do-Betty?*" a queer small voice said presently at her side.

Betty looked up with a start. A gray parrot sat on the step, a ribbon fastened to its foot; and at the other end of the ribbon was Axel, mounted on the twin lion and chuckling with mischief.

"Oh, oh!" cried Betty, flying to the ground and seizing on him joyfully. "Is it really you, Axel? How could you get here without my knowing it? Where did you get the sweet parrot? Have you seen your mother? How long have you been here?"

"Don't step on the parrot, child! I came in the last train but one, and Griffin drove me over. That's why you did n't see me in the coach; but I saw you, from mother's window. Have you been running out that way all day to watch for me?"

"Yes, indeed," said Betty, in high excitement, "and all day yesterday. Oh, dear me!" she sighed, hopping about like a wren, "I am *so* glad you have come! And the nice bird, does he belong to you? How does he know my name?"

"Oh, he 's been trained. Somebody made me a present of him, and I thought I would bring him home to you. Mother does n't like parrots. So I

tied the ribbon on him, and taught him what to say; and when I tweak the ribbon he says it." Axel illustrated by tweaking the ribbon, and — "*how-do-you-do-Betty?*" murmured the bird again in thoughtful tones.

"O, how good of you, Axel!" cried Betty, enchanted, clasping her hands. And then she fell to examining him to see what changes six months' absence had produced. He did look a little larger, she thought, and stronger; and he had his curly poll well-clipped, and wore a new jacket which made him look rather older. She sat on the lowest step, admiring him. The sweet garden-air blew up from the flower-beds, and fluttered her hair; the pigeons cooed under the elm-trees; there was something wonderful in it. She felt strangely like part of a fairy story; the Prince had come home.

"Your mother read me all your letters, but I want to hear more. Tell me what you did out of school? What was there to amuse you?"

Then Axel related many histories of his doings, which Betty devoured breathlessly, and thought that he was getting quite tremendously experienced in the world. He had attended a great many concerts, and could mention a number of performers by name, with easy familiarity; he had witnessed all the parades and races of any account, and been to the theatre occasionally with the people who had charge of him; and he went to his dancing-class every week. He had also much to say about a certain Flora Tompkins, whose dancing was a thing to be

remembered. Flora Tompkins, it appeared, had black eyes and long black ringlets, and many dimples — a description most harrowing to Betty, whose hair suggested corn-silk, and whose small cheek made the purest of undimpled curves.

"What a nice name Flora is, is n't it?" said he. "It was the name of a goddess, too, don't you know?"

"What 's a goddess?" inquired Betty, rather nettled and very curious.

"Oh, a goddess was a — a Greek person, with wings shaped something like battledores, you know, who lived in the woods and had altars. They generally turned into trees and bushes, I believe," explained Axel, whose study of the myths was largely pictorial.

"Oh," said Betty, privately desiring a like fate for Flora Tompkins. "And has she wings shaped like battledores?"

"Nonsense; I did n't say anything of the sort," returned Axel, cuffing the lion's ears with a lilac-branch. "I only said it was a pretty name. Don't you think it 's a pretty name, now?"

"Oh yes, very. Was Tompkins the name of a goddess, too?" said Betty, naughtily, but with a simple face.

"They did n't have any last names," chuckled Axel, pleased at her evident pique. "But I like yellow hair best, you know." And Betty instantly glowed with bliss, and could have pardoned the annoying Flora any quantity of dimples after that admission.

"Betty!" a voice interrupted from the house. "Come in, dear, immediately; your practice-hour has just struck."

"It's my mother. She does n't know you are here, of course," Betty said, starting up. "Come in with me, and bring the pretty Poll. Dear me!" she added, putting a reluctant foot on the step, "I wish there was no practice-hour! I do so dislike to practice, you can't think" —

"Flora Tompkins can play five pieces, without her notes," observed Axel, laughing, as he followed up the steps.

"Can she?" said Betty, in a careless manner; and silently determined to play ten, by the next vacation-time.

CHAPTER III.

A GENTLEMAN FROM INDIA.

THAT her children should be musically gifted was always one of Mrs. Karlsen's strongest aspirations; and it seemed, during many years of her anxious training, that after all she would be disappointed by them both. The musical soul in her longed to see the bud of her own early promise break into flower in her daughters.

"It would make up to me for what I lost in the sealing-up of my poor voice," she said, reminiscently sighing.

Christina was put to practice as soon as she could sit for ten minutes together on a music-chair. It never seemed to bore the child particularly; she went at it with the unconcern of a little machine, and laid the foundations of an excellent technique, whatever else might be wanting in her future performances. But as she grew older her mother was compelled to admit mournfully: "No, she has not a spark of genius: she has not even the true musical temperament."

The second daughter became the object of still greater solicitude. From Betty with the yellow queue back to Betty with no hair at all to speak of,

she had been under the closest surveillance for a sign of the "sacred fire." Mrs. Karlsen had her brought every day in the nurse's arms and kept close by the piano; where she herself sat, and tried with fragments of her own well-remembered music to win the little ears and in-form the little soul with harmonies. On one of these occasions, having appeared to listen in a state of stupefaction, Miss Betty suddenly reached out her minute hands and brought them down on the keyboard with a wild but decisive swoop, suggestive of Thalberg at the least.

"Yes, Letitia," said John Karlsen, approaching with an air of grave interest, "the infant is a prodigy. Notice the breadth of her technique, and the boldness of her execution!"

But Mr. Karlsen did not particularly care about musical genius for his children.

The fact remained that Betty in her eighth year had not fulfilled the promise of those remarkable demonstrations; because, as she complained to her friend Axel, she "did so dislike to practice." Left alone at the instrument, she might be heard galloping through her scales at a rate to make Mr. Plaidy's hair bristle in dismay; and she left the music-stool as if it were suddenly red-hot, the instant her hour was up — not before, for she was very conscientious.

"Both my children disappointments!" her mother would say, vexed quite to tears. "It is really too much — and I hoped for something, at least, from Betty!"

"But, mamma, Christina practices quite hard,"

Betty ventured, looking abashed at her little humming-birds of hands; "and you know Aunt Karlsen writes that she is getting to play very well."

"Christina has no feeling; and that can never be acquired," her mamma said despondently. "I used to fancy that Betty — but, dear me! what is the use of feeling if one is not trained? If she could have an opportunity of *hearing* something worth while, perhaps" ——

The incitements which Betty needed were at hand. Axel's roguish speech about Flora Tompkins was the first. From that time on she went steadily to her piano at the regular hour, and delved through her exercises with an amusingly dogged air; once she actually worked at it five minutes beyond the hour. Her mother was mystified but happy. Betty's self-love, which was stronger all through her life than any one ever suspected, was behind the scenes.

And finally, one bright day in the Indian summer, an arrival occurred at the Karlsens'. It had been talked about days before; a lady from England, an old friend of Mrs. Karlsen, was coming to visit them for a day or two, and they were making great preparations to receive her. "I am so glad on Betty's account!" the little girl heard her mother say, and wondered why. She looked and lingered about, and noticed that the music-room seemed to be the chief seat of activity. There was much tuning going on, and piling up of music-books; the great portrait of somebody inspired, with long hair — which Betty regarded with awe — and the beautiful, sickly head of other

somebody with long hair, were wreathed with green; and the bronze Master in his niche frowned grandly upon a votive offering of myrtle and red roses.

The lady came, and Betty was dazzled by her — she could not tell why, for nothing could have been quieter than the visitor's tone of dress and manner. She had a slight, sweeping figure, and a young face, very poetical; and she spoke with a beautiful English accent, like Mrs. Karlsen's. Betty never forgot the visit; but of the lady she could never recall a distinct image — only an impression of dark gray silk, of very long white hands; of a pale arched forehead, with deep and misty eyes, and drooping hair. And of all incidents at that time she could only recollect clearly that the stranger had taken a seat at the piano, and with those long white hands called up such hosts of wonderful tones, such dream-like voices and echoes, that it was not to be believed the same piano which gave out unwilling reiterations of Plaidy day after day.

Betty went up silently and stood behind the absorbed player. There was a new world here. A strange, unspeakable feeling swelled under her little pinafore; she felt herself all ears, to drink in that stream of mysterious sound, and all soul, to feel it. She stood breathless while it lasted — until the lady's hands lay still, and she turned, quite pale, and bent one of her long, soft looks into the little girl's wistful eyes, which were rounded with tears. Betty was a desperately modest child; she would not, of all things, be seen to cry; and while the others were

coming up and talking around the piano, she slipped away and went behind the heavy window curtains.

She felt quite choked with the new sensation, and yet exultant, as if a delightful secret had been told her. It was the awakening. Her mother had uttered the last reproof she would ever have to utter on account of the child's distaste for music. That was gone for always, now that she felt, ever so dimly, the end from the beginning.

There was another time of enchantment, too, though less distinct — evening-time, when Dr. Brand and his wife came over, and it was all noisy and charming; but Betty kept apart behind the curtain, and when the magic voices began again, she listened and cried delightfully, feeling glad and still sorry that Axel was not there to hear; and so nodded off to sleep in her hiding-place.

She had one or two talks, before the visit was concluded, with the wonderful lady — Miss Gerard, they called her. Miss Gerard held the little girl's hand in her own soft palm, and said many things that Betty vaguely felt were beautiful, and emphasized them with deep, thoughtful eyes, that she knew were beautiful, resting earnestly upon her.

"Oh, Adeline, if you could only make a musician of my child!" Mrs. Karlsen said, looking almost adoringly at her friend.

"It is there," Miss Gerard answered, touching Betty kindly, with the sweetest of grave looks. "I wish I could have her with me for a while; but you will do much for her. Let her come to me in London one

of these days — if I live. And, Letitia, do not be ambitious for the child! Be satisfied to let her dispose of her own life; she will be happier as the little hearth-cricket than as the famous song-bird."

"Indeed, I know that," Mrs. Karlsen said earnestly. "I do not wish it otherwise; and my husband — he would not admit the question at all."

The music-room was Betty's favorite haunt after those days. Her mother sometimes saw her there, leaning on the piano quite immovable and seeming to listen, as if some echo waked by Miss Gerard's hands had lost its way and was still struggling among the strings.

They heard regularly once a month from Aunt Karlsen, always good reports of Christina's health and acquirements; among other things, that she improved steadily in her playing, and was said to execute remarkably for her age.

"After all, mamma, you will be having two musical children, in spite of your discouragements," said Betty, who could afford by this time to touch upon the subject of her own performance.

Christina's letters arrived generally every few weeks; very well composed, and written on the newest style of note-paper, in a curly foreign-looking script, rather difficult to decipher.

"Christina writes a very clever letter," her mother was apt to say, following the remark with a seemingly inconsistent sigh.

"I wish I could ever write so well, and so easily!" Betty would add. It was a family habit to make the

most of their opportunities for commendation of the elder Miss Karlsen. With respect to the letters, her mother would no doubt have been very willing to exchange some of their cleverness for a little more evident affection. But after all, as she said to herself, Betty was affectionate child enough to make up in a large degree for the beautiful elder sister's deficiency.

People wondered a good deal at the Karlsens' surrender of Christina so completely into her aunt's hands; they thought it very strange of the mother in particular. Somebody happened to hint this one day to Mrs. Karlsen, and felt reproached by the pained look that crossed her face.

"Christina has her choice," she said, quietly; "it is understood that she is to come home directly she is disposed. But she enjoys staying in the city, and has so many advantages there that we are obliged to feel it very fortunate for her. And her aunt is entirely without family, and finds so much comfort in assuming the charge! Even for my daughter's sake we could not refuse."

Aunt Karlsen did indeed delight in the privilege of her niece's company; and Christina certainly showed to much better advantage with her than she had done at home. Whether because the child had been precocious enough to discern the "profits involved," or whether because her self-consequent, luxurious nature agreed best with an adoring and light-minded relative of costly tastes, it was a fact that she had from the first taken to Aunt Bertha surprisingly. They

never had disagreements: perhaps because Aunt Bertha disliked "words," and easily let her niece take her own flowery way. "The sweetest temper in the world, if one lets her alone," she reported somewhat ambiguously, to the parents at Lyme. Well, that was something, Mrs. Karlsen thought; she could recall times when even "letting alone" seemed to fail in sweetening the temper of the small Christina.

"She improves, no doubt," the mother said to herself, reflecting on the approach of young-ladyhood for her daughter. It seemed an immensely long time since Christina was taken away to the city; and yet in all that time, as her mother remembered with a little shock, she had only come home once, for a visit of a week's length.

It was at first tacitly understood that the summer-time was most suitable for her trips to Lyme. But then there came one excuse after another: first Aunt Bertha was going to some delightful Springs for the season, and would not hear of sparing her to go home; then, another summer, Aunt Bertha had taken a cottage near Lake George, and there would not be time to visit Lyme before starting off to get "things" in order.

And this very last summer, Aunt Bertha took it into her head to set off for Europe at short notice; and in such a case, of course, all other plans were subordinated; and Mr. and Mr. Karlsen went down to the city to take leave of the travellers, and again to celebrate their return.

"Yes, your sister is wonderfully grown, and seems very much advanced in many things," her mamma answered temperately to Betty's eager questionings, after the last expedition. "We wanted to bring her home with us for a while; but your aunt had made so many plans and engagements for her that we were persuaded to wait a little."

Mrs. Karlsen was in her room one day, sitting in her low chair with a handful of letters, one of which she found unusually absorbing. Betty, glancing in at the door, thought how young and rounded her mother's cheek looked as the light touched it bending over her page.

"Is it you, child?" she said, raising her face; and Betty then fancied it looked less young after all, and showed a disturbed expression in its eyes. "The letter is from Christina — yes; and she sends love, and thanks you for the birthday gifts. — In her seventeenth year — to think of it!"

Her mother fell into a musing fit, and looked alternately out of the window and down at the scented sheet of pretty hieroglyphics.

But the letter was not shown to Betty, and she was of opinion that there was something in it of special significance. It came out a few days later. Christina was engaged, or would like to be — of course subject to the family's approval — to a "French gentleman from India," whose acquaintance she had made during the European journey.

"A French gentleman from India!" little Betty exclaimed, wondering.

"Your aunt appears greatly pleased with the project," said her mother, whose hands had seemed to be overflowing with letters most of the previous week. "Would you like to read what she says about it?"

"I am *more than satisfied*" — (Aunt Karlsen wrote) — "as I fancy you will be when you have seen dear Mr. Lecomte. His manner is distinguished; and if a trifle yellow, (Indian climate, my dear,) his features are *most striking*. The name, you perceive, is satisfactory, though lacking a title, which I regret, for Christina might well have expected as much. But, as the dear child says, (with her own astonishing forethought,) a title is not always accompanied by such practical adjuncts as Mr. Lecomte can offer — this last being a certainty, or I should have discouraged the acquaintance at once. He is connected with some house somewhere in India, very wealthy, — but don't be alarmed! Christina will not have to reside in that frightful climate. Dear Hector is too devoted to her complexion to think of such a thing. You will see that our charming suitor is everything you could desire for a *gendre*; I shall send him to you this week. — Pray don't be *too* much influenced by the consideration of Christina's youth! I was but sixteen myself when I married; and poor Caspar was always satisfied with my age. Hector is only thirty-four — a mere infant — *etc., etc.*"

"What does papa say to it?" Betty asked, much bewildered, putting down the letter.

That was always the supreme question, which had quite shaken Mrs. Karlsen as she laid it before her oracle in the quiet of his dressing-room.

"On the whole, my dear, how does it strike you?" she asked, persuasively, settling on the window-seat while her husband considered his morning neck-tie.

"You really take it in a serious light, do you, Letitia? I confess I had n't reached that point myself — having always regarded Christina as a baby."

"Approaching seventeen. Many people marry at that age."

"Ah. But as to suitability of years — thirty-four, indeed! I like Bertha's notions of suitability. If she calls her Hector an infant, what in conscience does she call Christina?"

"Well, — you know Bertha's way! And Christina is very mature, dear, for sixteen; and she is so peculiar, you know, that I have always felt it would not be wise to oppose her in a case like this, provided everything promised for her happiness. And thirty-four is really *not* old, particularly for a Frenchman."

"It is evident that you are on their side, Letitia, for some inscrutable reason. Well, I don't say — *On* the whole," continued Mr. Karlsen, carefully shaping his whiskers, "it is perhaps as well not to give the fellow his congé without looking at his references. It may be the best arrangement for Christina, after all. Her 'peculiar' organization, as you term it, seems to preclude our making her happy at home. In fact, though I 'm extremely obliged to Bertha for all her good offices, I see she has alienated the child from us to a perfectly surprising degree. Not that Christina ever showed us any uncommon affection; still, I would not have believed that a daughter of

mine *could* be so devoid of natural feeling as to practically desert her home for the sake of a little extra indulgence and gayety! I confess, my dear, that the fact has very considerably cooled my affection for Christina."

"Oh John, dear," protested Mrs. Karlsen, "don't say that! I could not really blame her for enjoying herself so much with Bertha. It is quite natural; what could we expect? — do remember she is only a child!"

"Yes. I think I mentioned that before, my dear," said John, with a shrewd air, "and I thought you did not seem to agree with me. I am glad to find that you do."

Mrs. Karlsen looked out into the elm-branches, and held her peace.

"Never mind, Letitia!" said her husband, smiling at her. "I have not raised any obstacles yet. We will — yes, we will make it a subject of cogitation. We will receive the young man, and put him through the catechism; and I dare say Bertha's estimate is fair. She 's something flighty at times; but I think her 'weather-eye' is clear enough."

CHAPTER IV.

COUNTESS-ELECT.

MR. LECOMTE arrived at Lyme in the course of the week.

A halo of romance encircled him, to Betty's curious eyes: but to the others he appeared simply an agreeable gentleman, rather yellow, as Aunt Bertha had intimated; to whose style and conversation no exception could be taken; and whom Mrs. Karlsen soon admitted to be "excellent form." He talked chiefly in French to his host and hostess, sometimes addressing a remark to his prospective little sister in rather queer English, with a manner which she thought very kind, and a bright glance of his pleasant black eyes.

His short visit seemed altogether satisfactory. Betty took observations, in her mute fashion; and decided that he had won his case, which quite suited her romantic fancy. She brooded over the marvel of Christina's engagement, trying to recall her impressions of her sister with as much distinctness as possible — which was not perfect distinctness. After some time it occurred to her suddenly that engagements are now and then followed by weddings; and her mind's eye was at once dazzled by visions of

splendor and white satin, with peals of music and oceans of flowers, all evoked by the gentleman from India.

She ventured to question her mamma.

"How soon will the wedding be, mamma?"

"Oh — not before autumn, I think. Perhaps in October."

"Dear me! what a time to wait!" But Betty had her music for a distraction; and then there was Axel at home for the whole summer, and as nice as ever, only that he was beginning to put on a few little grown-up airs, rather exasperating.

The wedding-day was fixed for October. Aunt Karlsen was determined, in spite of everything, to have the event take place at her house; it could be made so much gayer, she said, and so much more convenient for Christina's society friends. Mr. and Mrs. Karlsen finally let her take her own way; and it was settled that Christina should come home for at least a week during the summer. Mr. Lecomte would occupy that time by a short business trip which he found unavoidable.

It was late in August when she came. Betty had been spending an afternoon at the Brands', and Axel came home with her "across lots" in the evening. It was quite dark; they were laughing and splashing through the dew, trying to keep in the imperceptible path.

"There 's something going on at your house," Axel said, peering through the darkness.

A carriage rattled away down the road, its lamps

flashing behind the hedges. The house-door stood open, letting a stream of light fall sharply upon the lions' backs; a servant was going up with portmanteau and a load of shawls.

"Some one has come, — probably your sister. No, I won't go in now: not till to-morrow morning. Good-night," and Axel touched his cap — a ceremony which he always observed, even in the dark — and sprang back through the shadows.

Betty went up the steps, thrilling with expectation. They were talking in the music-room; she pushed open the door nervously —

"Yes, come, Betty — it is your sister, my dear; come and make her welcome!"

A slender young lady in a long travelling-dress raised herself slightly from her chair, smiling and holding up her unfastened wrappings. There was a languid air about her, as of something rather valuable, which Betty hesitated to embrace at first, for fear of hurting it. But she had a pretty suave manner, which answered very well for cordiality; and she kept Betty's fingers in her own with quite a gracious little pressure for some time after they had all resumed their seats, close together.

Betty was astonished at herself for not having remembered how very pretty her sister was. She improved the opportunity of looking at her while the father and mother were getting answers to their numerous questions; and decided that Mr. Lecomte's affianced had the most beautiful face she had ever seen, in spite of the unremoved travel-wrappings. A

great gray veil was still swathed around her head, hiding all her hair in a way that would have been fatal to almost any beauty; but under its folds two lovely eyes looked out, large, wonderful, and deep-violet in the evening lights. There was not much color in her face, perhaps from fatigue; a small but delightful smile visited it now and then, and lightly dented its pretty oval. And with all her baby-like freshness of cheek, it was hard to believe that the young lady, of manner so "formed" and graceful, so tall and slight of figure, was not well beyond twenty, instead of barely seventeen.

Betty's admiring survey was soon checked, as her sister was taken away to her own apartment for the night; but all through her dreams she was followed by violet eyes, and a sweet, searching voice, with a faint tremble in it, like the quiver of a harp-string.

She was up with the doves and chip-birds in the morning, wakened by her haste for another sight of this astonishing sister. But Miss Christina observed Aunt Karlsen's custom of taking her chocolate before rising, and breakfasting at noon when her mamma's household sat down to luncheon; so that Betty spent the morning hours in loitering about wistfully till Axel rambled over and assumed his favorite post on a lion's back.

"Was it your sister?" he asked, as Betty fluttered over the steps like thistledown, and settled happily at his feet.

"That it was; — and, oh, Axel, she *is* so pretty! You never saw anything like her, I 'm sure. And

she has such a sweet voice, — very much like mamma's, only it trembles a little, as if she was not very strong. But she looks well, though her face is pale. And do you know, Axel, I felt just a little afraid of her, I did, really!"

"Afraid!"

"Yes; but only because she is so — so nice. I am very fond of her, but she makes me feel smaller than ever. I think really she must be what papa calls a polygon of perfection!"

Axel gave a delighted whoop, and sent up his cap into the elm-boughs.

"Polygon is good!" he exclaimed, recklessly. "Did you ever hear of Mrs. Malaprop, Betty?"

"Oh me, what did I say? Was n't 'polygon' right?" asked Betty, coloring and wincing.

"Your father generally says 'paragon.' Never mind! No, no, I was n't laughing at you — only at Mrs. Malaprop. Tell us about the 'polygon.' Does she look *engaged?* Why does n't she show herself? Is she tall?"

"Oh, very tall, and very grown-up looking. She looks like somebody in a story. And she has such eyes — so big and so very dark: I dreamed of them all last night."

"Bless me! I don't know but I shall be afraid of her myself! Are n't you going to let a fellow look at her? Why don't you ask me into the house, you uncivil girl?"

"She has n't come downstairs yet," Betty explained. "I have n't seen her myself, to-day. She

does n't take her breakfast till twelve — just think; and I am *dying* with impatience!"

"But what — who is this, then?" demanded Axel, slipping off his seat and looking up open-mouthed.

A most surprising little vision was occupying the topmost step; and now slowly descended, nodding at them with gracious airiness.

"Why, it *is* Christina!" murmured Betty, staring still harder. Yet such a different Christina from the tall, pale young lady of the night before! Here was a neat little figure no taller than Betty's, costumed like a large doll in short white skirts and a rose-colored jacket; glittering brown hair tied down in a childish curly knot at the back of its neck; two clear eyes as blue as the sea, with pretty flushes under them on the smiling cheeks.

"Good morning!" said Christina, her rosy ribbons all fluttering. "And is this Axel Brand? I supposed you would hardly remember me." And she reached down a little hand to Axel, who stood very grave, holding his cap, and made one of his grown-up bows. Betty took the other hand and stroked it shyly.

"You look so different this morning, Christina," said she. "I thought your eyes were dark, and I was telling Axel so. And now they are as light as mine, and as blue as — as" —

"'As the fairy flax,'" said Axel unexpectedly, out of the Sixth Reader.

"Oh, they change," smiled Christina, twinkling them. "They are chameleon eyes. You 'll see them dark again by and by."

"And she said you were very tall," Axel added. "I don't know what was the matter with *her* eyes, but you ought to have heard her description of you. I thought you must be at least five feet ten, from her account."

"It was my dress last night — a long dress always makes one look tall, don't you know? This short one, you see, has just the opposite effect," said Christina, daintily "toeing out" with the Frenchiest of little silk-wrought slippers.

The future Mrs. Lecomte possessed the faculty of adaptation. Young as she was, she had found out that it was much more agreeable in general to *be* agreeable. Very likely she had chosen her juvenile make-up as better suited to her young companions than a more dignified style, which she would reserve for intercourse with their elders. She was also very clever at taking people's measure. Having inspected Axel from her chamber-window before descending, she felt in rather better humor for doing the agreeable; it struck her that for a boy of fourteen he was not so bad — on the whole, might be better worth one's attention than most boys of fourteen.

So she set about her rôle of complaisance, and played it so well as to make them quite forget for the time that she was a young lady in Society, with her wedding-day set down for October. Betty's awe of her was entirely dissipated. She circled about through the garden with them, looking at their old playgrounds; Betty was in such a state of satisfaction that she forgot about the grievances and the teasings which not seldom took place there.

Christina interested herself in everything, even the pigeon-cotes and chippies' nests.

"I used to throw pebbles at them, like a small savage," she said, looking at Axel. "Do you remember how furious it used to make you, and how you used to storm at me?"

"I remember that better than anything else about you," replied Axel, with the sincerity of fourteen years. He thought she did not look very repentant of those early misdeeds.

Christina laughed a little; she was more interested in Axel than in the birds' nests. "He has a very nice manner," she said to herself, "very gentlemanly; and he is clever, too, for a boy. I shall be quite amused, after all."

By the time they had idled back to the lilac-bushes their conversation was on a very familiar footing: they were even talking about Mr. Lecomte and the circumstances of his first appearance at Lyme. Christina chattered it all over to the others with a perfectly matter-of-fact air, as if it were the most natural thing in life to be engaged to a French gentleman from India, with unknown quantities of money. Axel made a pretence of joking about it, and began to address her as Countess, by way of a quibble on the happy man's name; and Betty took it up too, after looking in her sister's face and seeing that she was rather amused than vexed at the mock title.

"I ought to have had it in good earnest," she said, languidly flipping the pink ribbons of her garden-

hat. "Counts grow on the bushes in the old countries, but they 're not generally worth picking off. We saw countesses by dozens on the Continent — such ordinary-looking women, most of them! I was sure *I* would make a much better one."

And then, conscious of a lapse from her first simplicity, and with a slight sense that boys of fourteen were sometimes precocious enough to pass criticisms on older people, the Countess-elect changed the subject.

If her week's visit at home was not a pleasant one, it must have been Christina's own fault. Everything was done that could be done to amuse her. They had little garden-parties, driving-parties, riding-parties; they went to dine with the Brands, and the Brands came to dine with them. On these occasions Christina resumed her panoply of long dresses and dignity, and seemed to find great enjoyment in meeting the demands of the toilet.

Betty waited on her incessantly, and thought herself greatly privileged. It was not for some time that, the first dazzle subsiding, she began to wish for somewhat closer relations with her sister, and to feel doubtful if there was that possibility in Christina's nature. She wondered whether Mr. Hector Lecomte had been favored with any glimpse of warmer dispositions in the young lady than her family had discerned. She talked about him one day as she hung on the end of the frilled toilet, watching her sister complete the pretty nest of gold-brown puffs which was to appear at the Brands' dinner-table in the evening.

"I liked him so much, Christina," she said, finishing a synopsis of Mr. Lecomte's visit. "He was very good to me."

"Yes," said her sister, pondering the effect of a green-and-gilt butterfly among the puffs, "people generally call him very good. I wonder" — dandling the insect on his spiral to make his wings flutter — "whether this would n't look better in my hair than a spray of flowers? I am *so* fond of butterflies for ornaments! If Master Axel were present," she added, locating the enameled deception, "it would be just his impertinence to say there was nothing so appropriate, I suppose. That 's a very sharp boy, that Axel!"

"Axel never means to be impertinent," said Betty, flushing a little and feeling stirred to his defence. "He is very quick and clever, and he says things without thinking, often."

"Oh, I find no fault with that. I 'm glad he is not stupid. He thinks a good deal of himself, one can see — not that it 's unreasonable in such a bright, nice-looking boy."

"Yes, he *is* that, is n't he?" said Betty, much mollified. But she found herself quite astray from the subject of Mr. Lecomte; and she wanted extremely to see some indication that Christina was very fond of him.

"Mr. Lecomte gave me his photograph," she pursued, returning to the charge; "it is like him, but the eyes are not handsome enough. What bright ones he has! Don't you admire his eyes, Christina?"

"Oh, madly," said Christina, with great calmness, giving a final dust of gold-powder to her head out of a mysterious little instrument.

"Aunt Bertha does. I thought perhaps," said Betty innocently, "it might have been his nice eyes that made you fancy him, in the first place."

"His *beaux yeux?* — '*les beaux yeux de sa cassette*,'" — Christina said, turning around with a laugh. "You don't know Molière yet, Betty? No, of course — neither do I. What tremendous eyes *you* have got, child! There, shut them up — never mind about the quotation."

"Tell me what it means, Christina dear!"

"La-la-la-a-a!" chirruped Christina, whisking the gold-dust from her shoulders. "It does n't mean anything. No matter what it means. I wonder if I can't have some hot water: it 's so nice for one's face. Aunt Bertha always uses it; she says it is better than fog for the complexion."

Betty departed in search of the hot water, with a deepened sense of separateness from her sister. "I should be so fond of her, if she would let me," thought the little maid, quite melancholy. "She is kind, but she seems so far away from me, somehow. I 'm afraid she does n't care very much for anybody, — not even for poor Mr. Lecomte."

She tried to shake off the dull feeling, and to be amused by her sister's gay chatter; but there was a shade of thoughtfulness still on her small face, even when they had all crossed the green path to the Brands' cottage, and were tasting the delights of that

enchanted ground. The Brands admired Christina's grace and brightness and charming face; and showed it plainly enough to satisfy the most exacting of parents.

"Yes, I think we have some reason to be proud of our daughters," said Mr. Karlsen, rather complacently, "in respect at least of their external endowments." He was talking to Dr. Brand in the latter's study, opening toward the garden. There were grape-trellises in sight, with quantities of ripened clusters. The trio of young people had gone out to lighten the vines, and the two gentlemen were observing them from the great leathern chairs in the low study window.

"A pretty vista there," said the Doctor, a smile gathering in his dark eyes.

The children had found a step-ladder in the arbor, and put it to use. Christina had insisted on mounting it to choose the clusters; she was dressed in faint green, and her glistening head nodded about like a singular flower among the vine leaves. Axel and Betty were below with baskets.

"Countess, you look like a katydid up there!" called Axel mischievously, alluding to her green raiment; whereat the Countess lost her dignity and pelted him wrathfully with grapes.

"Betty will never be so handsome as her sister," remarked their father, though not appearing to regret the fact much.

"Christina will make a fine woman," returned the Doctor, critically. "But if you asked my honest

judgment, as a connoisseur, I should give the preference to little Betty. On account of the type, my dear fellow — the race characteristics. They are all there — Scandinavia personified! She will grow up a regular little Danish lily. I 've seen a portrait in the Rosenborg gallery that she 's very like — a lady of the blood royal, sir. Look at her now," pursued the Doctor, with great earnestness; "see that little face, as clear as a cameo; see those great eyes, full of Northern dreams; and that flaxen hair — which my young scamp appears to have designs on at present, the rascal!"

The "Danish lily," all unconscious of criticism, was justifying the title, as she stood up straight and slim beside the ladder in her plain white dress. A bar of light fell down upon the pale and pure outline of her small cheek, still with that thoughtful shade lingering upon it. Axel, too, was looking at her; there was a dash of the poetic in him, enough to suggest to his boyish mind Beatrice, Marguerite, and other familiar blondes of romance. Notwithstanding which, he was making arrangements, in the background, to twitch the innocent yellow braid of "Scandinavia personified."

Dr. Brand still smiled as he looked on from his study window.

"I am glad," said he, turning his black eyes with a mild twinkle upon his companion, "I am glad it is not little Betty who is promised to the Frenchman."

CHAPTER V.

AN EARLY EPISODE.

DURING Dr. Brand's university course in Denmark he had become the richer by two things, both of which he was afterwards grateful for — a friend and an experience. The one was Max Lindholm, a flaxen-haired, honest soul of a classmate, who from their first acquaintance had regarded Brand with that painfully warm admiration which is such a common fever among collegians. The other was something not so acceptable at the time, but subsequently classed by the Doctor among the useful lessons of his life.

In the society which the young men used to frequent — the cream of Copenhagen society, one may be sure — there was a very conspicuous figure of a young person around whom the University men, military men, and others were accustomed to dangle. Else Oersted was an adopted daughter of one of the best families. Her origin was not generally known; it was thought that there was a strain of *Zigeuner* blood in her veins. Her beauty was not of the national type at least, and she had a pair of extremely fiery and singular dark eyes. The Oersteds were very fond of her, but she was not universally liked, and had

in fact the reputation of being a rather dangerous girl.

Brand first met her at a small supper-party, where he sat next her at table, and was attracted by her lively talk. Late in the evening, as the guests dispersed, he was tapped on the arm by a young Englishman and fellow-student.

"I see," said the latter, "you have made the acquaintance of the Oersted. Let me offer a suggestion. You will do better to keep away from her. She is a witch."

"What?" said Brand, staring. "Come, you are too severe! I thought her very mild and amiable."

"She is a witch, I tell you. 'Mild and amiable!' Yes, so it begins. I know what I am talking about, Harold. 'All 's fish that comes to her net,' as the vulgar saying runs. I came very near being one of the unlucky fish myself, and she played a pretty fly for me; but I saw what it was made of, and got off just in time. Now I always want to warn any unsuspecting ones that I see headed that way."

"Thanks, Liston. Your simile is good, and savors of a Norway sporting season. But I think I can tell a feather fly from a real one generally, and I don't expect any to be played for me."

Other people beside the Englishman favored him with similar warnings, till Brand began to think they were all jealous of him. Perhaps some of them were; but their advice had precisely the opposite effect to what they intended. He began to study Else Oersted, and to go out of his way for opportunities to

find out what it might be that made her so dangerous. He got into a habit of defending her to her censors, and frequently became quite heated with his championship. And the more he defended her, the less able was he to see anything objectionable about her. He watched her talking to other men in a cool, chaffing way which suggested a degree of contempt for them each and collectively; but when he approached she always looked up with a revived air, as though saying to herself, "Ah, here at last is one with whom one may converse!" Her narrow dark eyes were capable of expressing a great many things, and of intimating that there was much more behind which was well worth expressing.

Young Brand came to the conclusion before long that he was the only person who understood her; which at once flattered him and explained the common attitude toward Miss Else. He was then young enough and conceited enough to feel a double delight in her apparent appreciation of him. It came to its natural climax at last; and the Englishman, friendly adviser number one, stood aside and shook his head.

Brand went one late summer day on an excursion with some friends to the park of Bernstorff. The Oersteds were among the company; Else was, whatever the other women might say, the most fascinating figure among them all. She was dressed in white from head to foot; her eyes were like vivid lines of black in her delicately white face. Brand kept a constant watch upon the spotless draperies as they

drifted slowly up and down the green paths; then he attached himself more closely to them, and by and by — he thought by his own manœuvre — found himself strolling alone with this fair Zealand Sphinx, whom nobody but he understood!

He was an ardent young man in those days — ardent in his love as in his patriotism. Both were novelties to him, and he rushed into them headlong. Probably the trees of Bernstorff listened to many a word that afternoon which Dr. Brand of Lyme village would have blushed to own. But then he meant it all; and certainly the Bernstorff beeches never shaded a more frantically happy, light-headed and hearted young simpleton than Harold with the dark-eyed Sphinx in his arms. They talked in the language of the country, and already it was *thee* and *thou* with them.

"Wilt thou forgive me," he asked her, "if I confess that it was curiosity, Else, only curiosity which drew me to thee at first? They were all warning and cautioning me; they were envious probably. So I wanted to find out for myself what it was that should make Else so fatal to me if I dared go near her!"

"And didst thou?" Else asked in a soft, jesting voice, looking up through her black lashes without raising her face. "Didst thou find it out? Tell me, then, what and where it was!"

"No, that can I not, my soul," said the young man, drawing a great sigh out of the fullness of his joy. "Unless it lies here" — and he made the mocking

eyes close with a light touch of his lips. "One thing they said truly," he added, looking away as if dazzled by his happiness. "Thou art a witch! Yes, Liston was right — thou art a witch. What art thou looking for, my witch?"

Else had swayed away from him with one of her peculiar motions, and knelt in the grass searching it with her slight hands. There were some small wild-flowers growing around them; she made a little bouquet and tucked it, not into his buttonhole, but into his breast-pocket, and pressed it, laughing, against his heart.

"Is it thy pledge, Else?" said he, smiling curiously. "It is a frail one. Yet it is sweet, so never mind. What wilt thou have for mine? this ring?"

"Oh, no; not the ring. That would be too conspicuous: people would recognize it. Something small; something that will not be noticed."

"Not be noticed? What! is Else ashamed to acknowledge me for her property? So! we are to make a little mystery of it, are we?" said he, in a bantering tone, but feeling a shade of disappointment. "Must we have a secret betrothal? and am I to keep everybody in the dark while thy ladyship so pleases?"

"Ah, do, Harold!" said Else, coaxingly, leaning up against his arm. "I should like it so much better, for a while. I have my reasons, of course. Thou wilt humor me. And for a pledge, one thing does as well as another. See, this little crescent!" touching a small charm that hung from his watch-

guard. "It is flat and light; I will wear it on a chain around my neck, out of sight — as thou wearest thy flowers."

Harold laughed, kissed the crescent, and laid it in her slender palm, and kissed it again as it shone there.

He would have wished to proclaim all through the city how he had conquered and won "the dangerous Oersted;" but if it pleased her ever so little he would hold his tongue until she gave him leave to speak. And besides, he reflected comfortably, if his Sphinx had her reasons, they were certain to be good reasons.

The next few months formed an epoch in Brand's life, to which he might look back as a reformed opium-taker looks back on the first raptures of his insanity. Else was his opium. The little cloud of mystery which she would fling around their romance was not without its charm for him. On the whole, she conducted herself with very fair discretion, so far as Brand could see; and if at any time he fancied her to be accepting too much homage in their social assemblies, he had but to hint his disapproval, and a few words or a few looks out of the "witch-eyes" restored all his confidence in the most delightful manner. Undoubtedly the Oersted was a great power in her way.

As winter came down upon Copenhagen, they grew gayer than ever in that lively capital. There was a business-like round of suppers, balls, theatre-parties, and so on; the students and officers were in highest

feather. Else was in the midst of it all, quite unmoved by feminine cold shoulders so long as she was in demand by the masculine complement of society. Brand, of course, followed her about, and was happy, except when he saw the slights which she often received from ladies in their own circle.

In December there was to be a brilliant masquerade at a certain great house in the Amaliegade. It was a momentous affair; all the world of Copenhagen was talking about it. Else was going as a Fire-lady. She was so well pleased with her costume that she had allowed Harold to examine it; she had also appointed his own, which was a sort of Ravenswood costume of black velvet with a feathered hat. He was hardly less excited over the occasion, for he had a hope that after it she would agree to let their engagement become publicly known. In this hope he had provided himself with a second crescent to exchange for the little one she had taken — a larger one with a diamond in its centre, and their two names engraved on the reverse side. This one she would not hide out of sight, thought the happy student, as he ran over the lantern-hung doorsteps in Amaliegade with his love-token in his pocket. Muffled dance-music burst out from the upper rooms; his heart thrilled and thumped in unison with it. His head almost flew round, and his feet were quite ready to do the same. One dances so lightly at twenty-one!

He was not long in catching sight of the Fire-lady. The flame-colored silk of her dress flashed

past him almost as he looked in through the crowding masks at the door. Indeed, her disguise was very ineffectual with every one present: "the Oersted" was betrayed — as always — by her own peculiar bearing and the *tapageux* of her costume. But it was a beautiful and most effective one. Its orange drapery was rayed all over with flickering lines of gold thread, and looped up with ornaments like carbuncles, or live coals. A fraise of gold lace shot up around her neck in points as of flame; a device of red-gold in the shape of a torchlight sprung from the dark hair over her forehead. Her long white neck and little pointed chin looked like ivory under the black velvet loup. A fan of loose yellow feathers, tied with a gold-twisted cord, danced about in her fingers. She was a figure palpitating with light as she moved; it seemed almost that one might burn his fingers at her.

"Do you see that Comet?" asked one mask of another, within earshot of Harold.

"Is it a Comet?" said the other; "I took it for an ambassadress from the Inferno — perhaps Frau Lucifer in person."

"Hush, fellow; it is the Oersted!"

"Oh; profound apologies!" said the second mask, ironically; "I was not aware" —

Harold thought he recognized the voice, and glanced around scornfully. "Jealous idiot!" he muttered, as he went to take possession of his Else.

They danced and danced; the student had never been so happy in his life. It was the most brilliant

of his opium-dreams. He was conscious that his demeanor was scarcely in keeping with the suit of sables which Else had made him wear; but he could not help it: all the lights of the ballroom seemed to have got inside his head.

"It is so hot — so hot!" said she, panting, after a wild galopade. "Is there no place where one can breathe? Take me out of the crowd: I am stifled!"

He took her away to a small room where the music came faintly, and the air was fresh. No one was there; the lamps were few, but the blaze of her fantastic toilet seemed to light up the dim place.

"Water — ice — anything!" said the Fire-lady, sinking into a chair. "I am playing my part too well — I shall burn up. Fly, Harold!" She loosened her mask and fanned her face.

As Harold pushed through the crowd below, a blue domino saluted him, with a sign which he recognized, and took him by the arm. It was a young officer from the garrison, with whom he was on very good terms. A sudden whim popped into the student's head which, in his state of illumination, quite delighted him.

He pulled his friend into a cloak-room. "Take my hat, von Holst," said he, "and lend me your domino, that's a good fellow! I want to play a little trick on somebody, just for a few minutes. You're so nearly my size: will you oblige me?"

"Oh, with all the pleasure in life," returned the officer, promptly flying out of his domino. "Behold — Canute, King of Denmark! I've got an-

other mask in my pocket. You see, I 've been playing a trick on somebody myself, and have a double equipment. I 've done with the domino; you can keep it as long as you please. *Glück auf*, my boy!"

Harold slipped into the domino, found a goblet of water and hurried back to play his trick.

Else sat in the little room as he had left her, a shape of almost diabolic brightness; her mask lay upon her lap; she made no motion to put it on when the blue domino appeared, but looked up with a calm acceptance of the fact that her disguise had been merely nominal.

"Is that water for me, Colonel von Holst?" said she placidly.

Harold stood still and wondered. Then he advanced and offered her the goblet with a deep bow, in military style.

"I thought my identity was safe," said he, imitating the officer's tones as nearly as possible, "but perhaps it is a sorceress who speaks from this dazzling raiment."

"You have been betrayed," returned the Fire-lady, smiling. "Your disguise was revealed to me; besides, your figure, and now your voice, disclose you. Canute, King of Denmark, is hidden under that blue silk. You see I know. I bribed some one to tell me."

"Indeed!" said the vicarious von Holst, folding his domino more carefully around him. "I am highly honored by such interest. May I presume to ask — but first of all, if I am not addressing

Circe the enchantress, is it perhaps the Spirit of the Sun? or a stray Planet? or" —

"None of these," said the Oersted, bending slightly to hand him the empty goblet, with one of her dark-lashed significant glances. "My mask is off, as you see. You are addressing the person who was formerly of much more importance to you than now, if one should judge by appearances. But you may not possibly recall her name, Colonel von Holst."

"*Else!*" murmured the domino after a pause, in a faintly experimental tone.

"Ah, you do remember! It is so long since you last made use of it that you might well have forgotten. It is pleasant to hear it once more from your lips. Why have you avoided me, Ernest? Who influenced you? I have missed you so wretchedly, and tried so to see you, that it might be explained" —

"Thanks!" said a hollow voice from the domino.

"What a chilly, cruel word for me! Do you refuse to believe that I missed you?"

"It has been remarked," returned her companion, with a visible effort, "that you were not likely to suffer for companionship. I have understood that you were not ill-satisfied with the society of a certain person who is present this evening — it is hardly necessary to mention the name of Harold Brand."

"Ernest!" exclaimed the Fire-lady in an admirable tone of tender resentment; "have the gossips devised that, too? And is it possible that *you* re-

peat it to me? — *you*, of all human creatures! and can you believe it?"

"Were you then trifling with him, Else Oersted?" called out the domino in a deep, tremulous voice. He had ceased to imitate the Colonel's accent.

Else turned her head observantly, and did not speak.

Harold pushed back the hood of his disguise, and showed her his white face in silence.

The Oersted surely had a fine command over herself: she changed not a feature, except to laugh just perceptibly. "Well," she said, leaning back with magnificent coolness, "what hast thou gained by thy little play, Harold?"

The unhappy student nerved himself. "No, Else," said he, trembling, "make no pretence! Do not try to make it appear that you recognized me. It is too late for that. I shall ask no questions — I want none of von Holst's secrets: he has been my friend. But if you can explain your own words,— you who have been the life of my life since the paradise-day at Bernstorff, — if you can show me any way to retain my faith in you, — do, do, Else! I will believe anything, almost anything, if you can give me your honest word to it, and say that we belong, still and always, to one another!"

She wore a red-gold armlet hung with many little coins; and she tinkled them thoughtfully with her finger while he spoke, his voice and eyes full of imploring tears.

"No," said she, in a soft, indifferent tone; "it is

not worth while. I am tired of you! What you believe is of no particular consequence to me. You are not bound — your movements are quite free; I do not keep you."

The young man felt a singular coldness run through all his fibres, as if a breaker had covered him. "Not bound — " he repeated after her. "Then you did not at any time intend to marry me?"

"Assuredly not."

"And if I ask why" —

"Why? — Oh, my good friend, you are too *dark* for me! I, a brunette — Fancy the tableau, and the jests of one's friends. 'The Queen of Clubs marries the King of Spades!' Ha, ha, ha! Never! I must marry a blond man or nobody."

"Good heavens, what a reason!" cried poor Harold in a derisive agony. "Then why did you have anything to do with me? Why did you make me think you cared for me?" He felt in his pocket for the little pledge of Bernstorff wildflowers, which he wore about religiously in a silken envelope. They had crumbled there into a fine unsavory dust.

Else looked at him out of her odd black eyes. "Well, I 'll tell you that. I heard that you were a very rational young man, and very hard to influence. One who knew you twitted me, and said I might try as I would to win you over, I should try in vain, if you were warned by your friends. That was all that was needed to make me do my best — with very good success, I think." All the fire-rays on her garments seemed to throb and twinkle with wicked delight as she spoke.

"Ah," groaned the young man to himself, "it is indeed all over!" He opened the envelope and let the flower-dust slide out upon her gay drapery.

"I am sure," she said, lifting her eyebrows at it with insolent calm, as she rose to shake it off, "it has done very well: it has lasted out my time."

What a strange charm there was about her even yet, standing up in all her false, brilliant, impudent grace! A hot wave of despairing anger followed the cold one that had just overswept the student. He took a step forward and caught her by the wrist, blindly, savagely. The little coins dangling around her arm bit into it like teeth under his rough grasp.

"*Go away!*" cried Else, in a scream of passion; and her eyes suddenly gleamed out at him with the venom of a basilisk.

Harold recoiled, looked in her face a moment, and rushed from the room. As he went down the stairway he pulled off his domino, and then flung it into a corner of the cloak-room.

The Englishman, passing by the doorway, stopped and looked in at him attentively. "So!" said he, nodding. "What did I tell you?"

"Oh, ravens croak the truth sometimes," said the young man bitterly, wrapping himself in his outer cloak.

"You are indeed a brand snatched from the burning," added the Englishman, with a certain earnestness under the ill-timed pleasantry. Harold received it with a severe and ghastly hauteur; but the other went on undismayed.

"Yes, I have kept you in view all this time. I said to myself, 'sooner or later he will get a hard hit; and as a friend and adviser I shall make a point of being on hand to pick him up.'"

"Greatly obliged," returned Harold frostily, "but you see I did n't need picking up."

"No — I see," said his friend, with great approval. "You are made of good stuff, you know. Oh, you 'll be cured, before long."

"I am cured already," said the student, firmly, closing the street-door upon himself and the winter-night.

He forgot about the conveyance in which he had come; it was not unpleasant to battle with the strong winds sweeping the Copenhagen streets. The illumination had died out of his head and heart; life was no longer made up all of dancing and loving. The oldest Councillor dissembling his *podagra* among the masks and candles that evening felt less aged than Harold Brand, struggling over the icy walks on his homeward road. The chant of a watchman making his round came musically upon the wind.

> "The black Night hasteth on,
> The Day is drawing nigh."

How dimly the street-lanterns burned! how eerily the wind spirits wailed! The opium-dream was over.

As Harold paced up and down his room that night, he suddenly remembered the jeweled crescent he had bought for his Sphinx. He pulled it out grimly, and threw it — not out of window, which

would have been very foolish, but into the farthest dark corner. Next day he picked it up again, and commenced a practical existence by taking it back to the jeweler's, and exchanging it for divers little mementoes to be distributed among his friends when he left the city.

If he had been of a less healthy nature, he might have turned cynical after his experience; but it only made him wiser, not sourer. He did not, like some, revile the whole feminine garden because he had encountered one poisonous flower there; but he wisely took to studying with all his might, went no more into society, nor to any place where he should meet the Oersteds; and at the end of another year took his degree and left for a "run" over the Continent. He revisited Denmark before going home to America; the Englishman was one of the first to meet him there. Brand took special pains to be cordial with him, remembering that Liston had really been most kindly intentioned toward himself, and not very warmly thanked therefor. The young doctor had recovered completely from his affair with Else Oersted, and asked for news of her with the profoundest serenity and self-possession.

"She has done a wonderful thing," answered Liston, laughing. "She has just espoused your honest friend, Max Lindholm."

Brand positively gasped, but not on his own account.

"Is it possible!" he exclaimed. "Pax vobiscum, my poor Max! — but I fear for thee." And then he

clapped Liston on the shoulder with a shout of laughter. "She has caught a blond one this time," said he, to the other's perplexity; "and the contrast will be charming!"

He sent a kind letter of good wishes to his old classmate, with a wedding-gift; and he steamed back to America with the friend and the experience thus permanently woven together.

It was not strange that Dr. Brand, with these memories in his mind, should look forward anxiously to the future of his only son. He saw the boy growing up rapidly, a lively and imaginative being, of more delicate mould than his father, and with rather less strength of will to fortify him in life. It would soon be time to set him afloat on the great current to steer for himself. How keenly the Doctor wished, as all parents must, that he might foreordain the destiny of his boy; or at least determine the influences which should work around him! Neither was it strange that the Doctor, watching the sweet promise of womanhood in the face of his little favorite, Betty, should found many a pleasant fancy on it, and dwell upon it until he had built himself a hope as strong as any he had ever dared entertain. The fair little Scandinavian-looking girl was always very dear to him, and became more and more so as she grew up, so mild and maidenly, beside his Axel.

And it was this fancy that softened the Doctor's smile as he looked out upon the young people from his study window.

CHAPTER VI.

THE REVEREND RODERIC MUSGROVE.

BETTY remembers but little of the few years following: perhaps because, as she thinks in her mature life, there was so little in them worth remembering. Of all the events, great or small, that may have taken place then, but two return to her now with any degree of vividness.

Christina's marriage first — not so distinct a memory as the other, because preceding it by two years. She thinks of it now as a whirling, travelling, trunk-packing period: of Aunt Karlsen's house as a grove of exotics, haunted by solemn black-faced serving-men; of Aunt Karlsen herself as a gorgeous and hysterical figure in much lace and many jewels. Of Christina's face as the quintessence of all known beauty, a nucleus of pearl-besprinkled vapor; of the happy Hector as lemon-colored and distinguished, embracing everybody in his emotion, and bringing out a fine locket for his "sister Betti"; of herself as a small factor in the ceremonies, dressed in white, and shaken with fears lest she should do something not established by precedent. And finally, more whirling, travelling, and trunk-packing; a grand break-up;

and a quiet return to Lyme with the first frost of the autumn.

The second memory — clearer than the first, as later — is Axel's departure; not now to school in the city, but across seas in the track of his predecessors; to Copenhagen, there to be fitted for the greater University of Life.

That was a partial eclipse of the sunlight in Betty's serene existence. She was passing the quietest of little lives in the quietest of little villages, but not unvisited by wistful speculations about the outer world, of which she had such a brilliant glimpse at the wedding-period just mentioned. Axel's summer holidays brought her the little whiff of excitement from outside which she looked forward to during the quiet winters. She realized sometimes that when he was old enough his father's plans for him would disturb the happy order of things; but she had not foreseen the revolution that finally took place.

It was a long time before she could accept the idea. Still, when the last adieux had been made, and the last dust-wreath had settled behind the coach taking Axel to Lyme station, she observed to herself, as she had done six years before, retracing her steps under the elms: "I suppose I must learn a lesson of patience." And in a day or two she had her little grief quietly tucked away, and was carrying about the same bright, simple little countenance as usual, over her lessons and music, and her charity visits to the poor folks in Lyme village.

Mrs. Karlsen had been used, in her home near

London, to such visits as a part of her girlish routine; in her American country home she kept up the custom, and taught it to Betty also. The curate in her English village used to consider her a ministering spirit; the simple shepherd of the Lyme Baptist flock came to regard her in the same light. She was a Church-of-England woman, naturally; but in Lyme there was no Episcopal church then — nothing but Baptist and Methodist and a little German Reformed on the outskirts.

The Baptist pastor, Mr. Goodwillie, was such a pastor as one meets sometimes — but none too often even there — in our out-of-the-way country towns; a well of gladness, goodness, and sympathy among his parishioners; and not only among them, but anywhere when an opportunity offered of helping somebody. An innocent, old-fashioned man, unworldly as to personal attire, whose cuffs were wont to recede shyly from observation; a college-trained man, but from a modest little second-rate Alma Mater, having missed the advantage of that wider course whose followers have the expensive privilege of *un*fitting for the ministry.

It was impossible to come in contact with Pastor Goodwillie, his people said, and not take a liking to him. John Karlsen liked him — whose goodness had a much more worldly tinge. Betty liked and admired him heartily, and noticed only with respect the shining shoulder-blades of his pastoral black coat. Doctor Brand liked him too, though on spiritual beliefs the Doctor held his peace; truly, what his

beliefs might be — if any — the Doctor himself may have been perplexed to state. And the poor people of Lyme liked Pastor Goodwillie; and many a rhapsody about him was poured into Betty's ears as she went around with her little basket, on the weekly visits to the cottages.

Old Mrs. Ricker, who lived away over on the eastern edge of the village, beyond the "German Reformed," — a neuralgic and devout old lady — was one of his most emphatic admirers.

"He put himself out yesterday, Miss Betty, to go away down to Micajahses after my medicine, which you know it was the wettest day we've had this season; and if ever there was a blessed sperit of light a-wearin' coat and trousers and a-walkin' visible amongst men, it is that Minister Goodwillie! His week-day coat is pretty nigh wore out, I noticed; and I see there warn't but one button to a side. They could n't 'a' ben off long, though, for there ain't a woman in Lyme but would 'a' sewed 'em onto him if they'd 'a' seen it. It's along of his bein' a batchelder, poor man! I wish to massy some rich woman could get hold of him and look after his temporal consarns; for Minister Goodwillie walks too much after the sperit to notice whether the buttons is on his coat or off it!"

Thus Mrs. Ricker to sympathizing Betty dishing out jelly and other dainties on a stand by her bedside.

"And have you heard tell about the new church they're to have in Lyme, Miss Betty? There 's a

heap of talk about it a'ready. It 's to be a High Church, they tell me; and Micajah says they 're goin' about tryin' to decide on which is the convenientest hill for buildin'. Micajah expects they 'll make it so steep there can't none go to it but them that rides in carriages a' Sundays! It 's for them Episcopal people — some new kink they 've taken up — but there, how I do talk! Your ma's an Episcopal by profession, I 'm told."

"Yes," Betty said. "But I had not heard about a new church. And we shall never leave dear Mr. Goodwillie, not even for the Church-of-England service, I am sure."

That was only the start of the High-Church movement in Lyme. It was not till three years later that the pretty stone chapel rose slowly within its belt of trees, its gray sides artfully veiled with green, as an Old World effect; its slender cross — as High as possible — pointing mutely to the heavens, and yet scandalizing the Baptist and Methodist eyes of rustic Lyme with its Anglican suggestiveness. A rector must further be secured; a brand-new one, with the best references, and a High order of talent. Nothing Low was to be tolerated about the new edifice.

"And we think we have him," said Mr. Harrod, the chief ruler among the Episcopalians, to Mr. Karlsen. "We think we have him. An Englishman, sir, of great talent, who left his parish solely on account of some slight differences with his people — being blessed with more liberal views on various points. Incompatibility of tenets, we may say. But a young

man of great brilliancy, sir, who will be an acquisition to Lyme as well as to the church."

"I congratulate both," observed Mr. Karlsen, placidly. "Though it seems rather unusual, don't you think, for so gifted a man to exile himself for a mere variance of opinion; and to come out — of all things! — to Lyme, and waste his sweetness on us outside barbarians?"

"The living, sir!" returned Mr. Harrod, with Episcopalian dignity, "the living which we offer him is not unworthy of consideration, even by the Rev. Roderic Musgrove. Exile is scarcely the term to be applied in this case. The Rev. Mr. Musgrove has a vigorous nature, sir, impatient of restriction, and drawn by sympathy toward the liberal atmosphere of our country. I have met him" ——

"Ah?"

— "Yes, sir, I have met him, at the house of a friend in Philadelphia; and I have been most favorably impressed. It seems to me perfectly natural that he should choose, under the circumstances, to take up his residence among American institutions; and I was myself instrumental in securing him to the rectorate of St. Agatha's."

"I trust that the benefit will be mutual," returned Mr. Karlsen gravely. And they walked out amicably for a look at the sun-tipped cross and spire of "St. Agatha's."

Mr. Harrod's daughter Rose was one of Betty's few intimates among the Lyme young girls. She was bright, decisive, and pretty, a great contrast to Betty

in appearance; a year or two older; with a face all over little flushes, like her flowery name, and small hazel eyes that lost themselves completely in her cheeks when she laughed. She was vivacious, something of a chatterbox; but she had also plenty of common sense.

"Well, Betty," said Rose Harrod, as the two girls, sauntering off for a spring ramble, caught a glimpse of the famous cross in the distance, "have you heard about the Rev. Roderic Musgrove?"

They were proceeding "tandem" through the thick grass of the roadside, with the noble disregard of country-bred girls for such possible toads, tarantulas, or other reptiles as might there inhabit.

"Oh, of course," said Betty, looking for a four-leaved clover as she walked; "but not so much as I should like. Mrs. Ricker has told me more than any one else, and it was very funny to hear her. I suppose she gathers her items from everybody she meets. She is quite shocked at some of them; but the one that seemed to trouble her most was that 'he had brought a fiddle-case along with him, and she 'd heard tell he was going to play on it himself!' She said, 'Landamassy, think o' Minister Goodwillie a-playin' on a fiddle!'"

And Betty laughed out in spite of herself, and then looked a little startled.

"Well," Rose said, laughing also, "it 's very likely he 'll do more than one thing to shock the old-fashioned souls in Lyme. I fancy he 's that kind of a man. It *is* a fact that he brought a violin with him,

and I believe he 's very fond of playing it. After all, where 's the harm ? so long as he does n't insist on playing it in church, which I suppose Mrs. Ricker expects him to do."

"I — don't know," answered conservative Betty, slowly. "Perhaps there is n't any. I hope there is n't, I 'm sure. But, at any rate, I 'm rather glad our Mr. Goodwillie is n't in the habit of fiddling. I don't think," she added, with another little laugh, "that our poor people would be quite as well looked after — not to speak of the rich ones — if he should spend *very* much of his time in that way."

"Oh well, Mr. Musgrove will make a good rector enough, I dare say," said Rose. "He 's very accomplished, papa thinks; and I can say for myself — for he dined with us yesterday — he 's very decidedly handsome. *Now* you 're interested, are n't you ? "

"Just as much as before," returned Betty, walking tranquilly, with her eyes fixed on distant St. Agatha's. "I don't know why his beauty should interest me particularly. I shan't see his face in *our* pulpit, and Mr. Goodwillie's suits me there well enough."

"Oh well, chicken, I hope you 'll continue thus placid about it. I hope the other girls in Lyme may share your indifference : but I don't suppose there 's one of them that won't flirt most dizzily with him if he allows it."

"Flirt!" echoed Betty, lowering her eyes from St. Agatha's upon sinner Rose, with profound incredulity. "With a *minister ! !*"

"Oh my patience ! " said Rose, in great amusement.

"Are you truly as simple as that? Of course they will; and if I 'm not mistaken in the man, he 'll be ready enough to let them. And will there be any harm in it, if you please?"

"Are n't you going up here to get some violets?" said Betty, who was unaccustomed to this tone in relation to clerical gentlemen, and found it a little bit shocking.

They had reached a small break in the elder-bushes which fenced the roadside, and now turned to make their way in through the branches.

"Be careful and not break off any," Betty observed, softly clearing her muslin skirts. "It would be unlucky. There are spirits in elder-bushes, who get very angry if any one hurts them. And when people go to gather the berries they should always make a prayer to the spirits and ask permission. Axel told me."

"Axel Brand? And who told *him* all that, pray?"

"The Doctor. It 's a legend in his country. I know it is n't true, so you need n't begin to laugh at me."

"Little goose!" said Rose, irrationally, and appeared to become lost in thought. Rose was eighteen, and felt a great advantage of years over Betty, who counted but sixteen.

A few steps had brought them from the bewitched bushes to a pretty slope, partly shaded by scattering trees, where the violets were thickly putting their pale-blue heads together. The girls sank down

here in a comfortable spot under a little maple. They could see the road from that point, and were at the same time screened from the eyes of chance passers. But Rose seemed disinclined to spy after such rare objects of interest; she stared thoughtfully at Betty, lying opposite, a pretty white figure, still childish, calmly filling its hands with violets.

"When is Axel Brand coming home?" Rose inquired suddenly.

"Next year," answered Betty readily, smiling at the prospect.

"I know something!" proceeded the other young lady, after a second's silence, deep with meaning. "I know why you're not particularly interested in Mr. Musgrove, and don't mind whether he's nice-looking or not! And why you don't ever take any notice of Jack Leavitt, nor any of his friends from Philadelphia! Oh you silly child! You think none of them will do after Axel, do you? None of them are worth looking at, are they? You might as well be honest and say so, right out."

"Might as well be honest?" repeated Betty, looking up slowly.

"Yes, you might, with me. You know well enough you don't care for any of them half as much as you do for that boy in Copenhagen."

This point seemed to require very short consideration on Betty's part. "Why, no," said she, with tranquillity. "Naturally, I don't."

"And how do you know what he's like now?" said Rose, arguing it. "When he comes home it

will have been five years since you saw him last, and he will be grown. And abroad a man grows very different from what he would have been at home. I am older than you," she continued, drawing up her round chin with dignity, "and I have seen more of the world. You don't know at all what Axel may be like when he comes back"—

"I don't think Axel will ever be any different," remarked Betty somewhat dreamily, but with perfectly unshaken conviction in her tone.

"What a foolish little snipe you are!" exclaimed Rose. She seemed to have a fondness for ornithological epithets. "You were nothing but a baby when he went away, and you 'll have to make his acquaintance all over again. I should n't wonder if you did n't like him at all!"

This seemed to amuse Betty very much, though she said nothing, and absently fingered open the heart of an unhappy violet.

"Axel was a nice boy," Rose admitted; "but I never could see that *as* a boy he showed much force of character. I should say — having seen a good deal of the world — that there were some fine possibilities in him, but that he would probably be too lazy to carry them out. That is how I remember him, from five years ago; and I dare say that when he comes home a man you 'll see the same thing."

"I idealize him, perhaps; I see him as he might be," said Betty, pursuing with daintily cocked head her joint analysis of the flower and her own sentiments.

"That would do well enough," commented Miss Rose sensibly, "if people were more in the habit of getting around to what they might be. Until you 've had an opportunity of judging, I think you 're a little goose to idealize him. A man's possibilities don't count for anything if he lets them slip."

"Hark!" said Betty. "Who is whistling?" She did not enjoy her friend's personalities, and was glad of the interruption.

They craned their heads forward to get a view of the whistler, and perceived a masculine shape coming along the road at a round pace. It was a young man, broad and strong across the shoulders like a wrestler, though not very tall; dressed in an easy "knock-about" suit of peculiar cut, and balancing a fishing-rod upon his shoulder. The smoke of a cigar wreathed gaily about his hat as he came along; but now and then he removed that impediment, and let his whistle ring out sharp and clear. As he passed the elder-bushes, a twig or other trifle lying in the road caught his attention; he stopped to get it, and began chipping at it with his pocket-knife, still keeping up his fragmentary tune. Betty was not acquainted with the air which he was whistling; but Rose giggled softly at it, and instantly smothered the giggle. It was an air from a comic opera then very much in vogue.

He could hardly have heard any sound beyond the bushes, but he stopped whistling for a moment and looked about as if expecting to see some one. Neither house nor man being in sight, he looked

down again, whistling in a fainter tone; and presently, unconscious of the two nymphs regarding him from their covert, moved on with slow steps, still working at his twig.

"That 's a stranger," whispered Betty, peering after him. "He has been after pickerel. What odd clothes he wears! I wonder who it is!"

"Why," replied the other nymph, cautiously stifling herself with a pocket-handkerchief, "don't you see? That 's the Reverend Roderic Musgrove!"

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTINA COMES HOME.

THE Reverend Mr. Musgrove was not long about making himself at home in Lyme. It seemed that he could hardly have found it difficult to make himself at home anywhere. Socially, he had the gift of amusing and seeming amused; he talked attractively and at great length — chiefly in the form of anecdote revolving about himself.

He went to the Karlsens' of course, in a social way. Mrs. Karlsen was pleased to talk about England with him, and to find him familiar with those portions of it where she had lived. Betty used to say that it was like reading Mr. Trollope — whose works her mother adored — to hear them talking about "shires," and "boroughs," and "dioceses," and Bishops and Deans. Mr. Musgrove's father, it appeared, had been a Dean.

Mrs. Karlsen was very gracious with him, though she declined to exchange her familiar seat in the Baptist house of worship for a more artistically finished one in the new chapel. She went now and then to evening service there, which was more than Betty could be persuaded to do. Betty had somehow taken a vague and quiet dislike to the young rector: no one

could tell why, unless she had been imbued with Mrs. Ricker's horror of his secular "doings." And yet his solid head and handsome shaven face made a fine appearance on his surpliced shoulders, bending above the praying-desk of St. Agatha's. Flowers were heaped there regularly by the Harrods; and gold-and-purple lights came down from the windows and illuminated the rector at his picturesque orisons, and the little choir-boys in white gowns.

Nothing more English in the way of worship could have been attained, Mr. Harrod felt with satisfaction. The heart in that devout Episcopalian fairly glowed as he took his Sabbath view of the little sanctuary — of his ladies, sedulously veiled and following the service as it seemed from large crosses with prayer-book attachment — and reflected that it was he who had planted and fostered this slip of Devotional Æsthetics in the midst of uncultured Lyme.

Betty accompanied her mamma there one Sunday, and admired the services and the chorals which had resulted from Mr. Musgrove's careful drilling. But she was an old-fashioned maiden in respect of religious things; and so was much worried to find herself beset by incongruous visions of cigars and fishing-tackle; while certain strains of an unspiritual nature wove themselves into the solemn tones behind the praying-desk. Betty was frightened at her own irreverence, and carefully kept away from St. Agatha's after that. She felt that it was not Mr. Musgrove's fault if she had caught her first impressions of him, unconscious, from the secular side of his nature.

The young divine had theories of his own about the privileges of the clergy — "emancipated ideas," he liked to call them, in those times when it was less the fashion than now for ministers to be as other men are. He liked to talk about them a good deal; and made a point of doing so in the early stages of an acquaintance.

"I hold," he explained in the Karlsen dining-room, "that it is a clergyman's duty to strengthen, so far as he may, the bonds of natural sympathy between himself and his fellow-creatures. This cannot be done, you know, by holding aloof from them nor by impressing them with a sense of his great superiority; but rather by showing that he is capable of understanding their weakness, being made like them with an animal as well as a spiritual nature. I do not admit either that the clerical robe is to cut a man off from his enjoyment of the beauties and advantages which Providence has placed under his hand. A clergyman may have his æsthetic feeling as well as another man; does the same Providence order that it shall be stifled? and why? — It would be false to say that my eyes are less susceptible than another man's to beautiful sights, or my ears to harmonious sounds; am I not then disparaging these Divine gifts if I shun them because of my calling? Is it anywhere written: 'If a man be ordained to the ministry he shall thenceforth abstain from equestrian exercise, and the handling of horses; he shall not delight himself in music, except such as his choir shall make unto him on the Sabbath; nor in any de-

vices for the outward beautification of his life?' That is not in my creed, sir. I feel it to be a pitiful misapprehension, which I hope some day to see universally outgrown. — Ah yes, just a dash of seltzer in it, if you 'll be so good."

Mr. Karlsen found this all very frank and very reasonable; and Mrs. Karlsen could see no opening for debate. Neither could Betty, listening silently over her fruit; nor could she account for her sudden vision of Mr. Goodwillie's cheery face, which never held aloof from anybody, either in sorrow or rejoicing; and yet whose brightness never languished for want of æsthetic surroundings; nor could any tinted lights from blazoned windows have made it a more welcome face to his fond and simple flock.

Along what separate ways were the "beautifications of life" scattered for those two men, thought Betty. Had Mr. Goodwillie made a mistake? was he overlooking, in the zeal of his busy beneficence, the gifts "which Providence had placed under his hand?" It occurred to her that those gifts were comparatively few, at popular valuation: the Baptist society of Lyme being less financially blessed than their High Church neighbors.

Betty kept her comments to herself, though. She was shy, in the first place; and in the second place she had such a transcendent respect for Mr. Musgrove's calling that he might have been twice as distasteful without getting a note of her criticism. And very soon she had other matter to occupy her thoughts.

After Christina had gone abroad with her husband, the family received letters from her with great regularity. First from France, where she was oscillating between Paris and the country-seat of Hector's relatives in Picardy. She and Hector were very generous with their riches, and sent from time to time boxes of foreign treasure to Betty and the others, packed at various points in their travels. Hector had taken a wonderful fancy, it seemed, to his little sister-in-law, in those short glimpses of her during the year of his betrothal. He took special delight in hunting out odd embroideries for her, and queer silky stuff for gowns, and all sorts of trifles for decoration, till Betty's room by-and-by looked like a small overstocked museum.

The several years following they divided between France and the rest of the Continent, drifting with the seasons from baths to mountains, and from mountains to coast, and back and forth in a luxurious stir that just suited "the Countess." Hector liked it, too; they were undoubtedly made for one another. So said Aunt Bertha, her eyes glistening with satisfaction as she read her niece's letters. They were very bright and showy letters, full of clever descriptions of her halting-places and the birds of passage whom she encountered: pages which the recipients were always glad to share with their friends. The Countess's letter from Savoy, in June, was thought to be a wonder of brilliancy until it was susperseded by the letter from the Basses Pyrenées, in September.

"Christina is getting a great deal of variety," said Aunt Karlsen.

By way of further variety it appeared at last that Hector's business relations in the East were strongly inviting his presence; and after a time Christina wrote that she was getting tired of Europe and had concluded to go farther even at the risk of faring worse.

Then came an interval of silence, agreeably broken by the arrival of a box from Madras, crammed as it were with rainbows and smelling rankly of the Orient. The accompanying pages were more thickly written than usual, and gave minute accounts of everything that had occurred between Paris and Madras; with doleful comments on the climate, and long eulogies on a lady's-maid whom the Countess had imported from France, and who was proving herself "absolutely indispensable."

Letters came after that with rather less frequency; and by and by there was a long, perplexing silence.

"These are French stamps; and yet I 'm sure this is Christina's writing," said her mother, wondering over the envelope which had just been handed in. There could be no question about Christina's whirling capitals, with their uniform air of being out in a heavy wind and getting the worst of it. "She wrote from Bombay that they should not get back to France this year. What does it mean?"

"Open it and see, mamma," said Betty, going through the room with a dish of crumbs for her par-

rot, whom she was training in expectation of Axel's return.

"How-do-you-do-Betty?" observed the parrot gleefully, catching sight of the crumbs.

"You naughty bird — no, that is *not* what I taught you to say! Not a crumb of cake for you until you get it right. Now, what was it I told you? *Welcome*" —

"*Welcome home, Axel!*" cried the bird exultingly, with his eye fastened on the dish. "Ha, ha! Give it here quick! welcome home, Axel! how-do-you-do?"

"He 'll be here next summer, Polly. That 's not so very long to wait, when he 's been away four years already. Shall we know him, do you think, Polly? will they have to introduce him to us? or should we recognize him half a mile away, you sharp-eyed Poll?"

"Oh, Betty!" interrupted her mother's voice, faintly.

"What is it, mamma? Has anything happened?"

"Yes, oh yes — it 's dreadful!" said Mrs. Karlsen, the paper trembling in her fingers. "Poor Mr. Lecomte — poor Hector — oh my dear, he is dead! — he died last March, in Bombay!"

A great whirring noise swelled in Betty's ears: it was so sudden. She was not used to fainting, but as her eyes dropped vacantly on the parrot again, she thought that he was veiled in a blue mist, and that it was getting twilight in the room.

"How did it happen? what was it?" she felt her-

self ask mechanically; and heard her mother's lowered voice answer dreadfully, through the whirring in her ears — "malignant fever." Then she became steady again; and her mother read the letter through, and they cried and talked — for though they were fond of poor Hector, it was not the kind of shock that takes away the need of speech. Yes, poor Hector! And poor Countess, left to travel alone through strange countries, in all the first bewilderment of her affliction — "For she is coming home, of course; home to us. Poor child! the dreadful journey — all by herself — how hard it will be for her!" her mother said sorrowfully, all her tender feelings aroused by the thought of Christina in trouble.

"But she is so used to travelling, you know," said Betty, taking up her rôle of comforter. "And the worst of it is over, now she is in France. Will she bring that waiting-woman with her, do you think?"

"Oh no; the woman is already dismissed. Christina must have sailed before this, I should imagine. She omitted — poor child! — to give the name of the steamer; but I think we may look for her within two weeks. Your aunt will know; she will see her first."

The two weeks passed, and another week; the family grew anxious. "She must be with your aunt by this time. I should have thought they would telegraph."

No telegram came; but one evening, as Betty went out into the starlight to take her solitary walk

under the elms, she heard the long-awaited coach-wheels scraping at the gate.

"Mamma, mamma!" she called back hurriedly, flinging open the door for light; and went running down the path. Figures followed her with lamps; she saw the coach-door swing open at the end of the dark avenue, and a sweep of black robes dismounting under the trees. A voice — yes, that was her sister's voice with the old sweet tremolo — was speaking:

"Pray be *very* careful of that smallest bag; it 's my bag of essences, and the things are so shockingly brittle! There, I 'll take it — Ah, Betty, my dear, here I am at last; and such a wreck! I feel absolutely in little fragments! Ah mamma, dear, and papa — what a pleasure it is to see you again, after all my wanderings!"

And so, for the third time since that strange unloving childhood of hers, Christina came home.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIRST DAYS OF WIDOWHOOD.

"MAMMA, she looks remarkably well," said Betty, assisting at the unpacking of boxes next day, while the traveller took her afternoon nap. "She does not seem any older; her face looks quite as bright as ever."

"As bright as ever," assented the mother, smoothing out some ill-folded lace. "Surprisingly so. But she has such an elastic nature — a great blessing, under the circumstances."

Betty had felt — and was vexed at herself for feeling — the old doubt creep up again, whether Christina did really care for poor Mr. Lecomte as he must have thought that she did. She studied her sister's face as she never had studied it before, trying to detect some marks of deep-seated grief under what was presumed to be her mask of cheerfulness. It was a mask of very natural appearance, Betty thought. Christina's cheeks retained their roundness, her thick hair its burnished curl, her figure its pretty youthful movements, and her eyes their changeable spark. Her mourning outfit was as complete and impressive as possible. She put a heavy black seal to her letters, and had sable tokens upon every article in her

possession; her wardrobe indicated, in all its details, the utmost elegance of despair. Not that she enjoyed wearing black, she said, as people often did, because it was considered becoming; she should be very glad when she might begin to leave it off.

The old volatile, childlike manner stayed with her still; and yet in certain moments Betty was startled with a sudden sense of her own extreme youth in Mrs. Lecomte's presence. For the most part, however, she found herself regarding her sister from an almost elderly point of view, and sometimes actually accounting for the young lady's seeming indifference on the ground of immaturity.

But once in a while she had another glimpse of Christina, sitting by herself, quite still, with a curious pale, absent look, her blue eyes grown large and purple, and lifted vacantly into space. And Betty felt a kind of relief at this, as a sign that the poor deceased had some tender hold upon the memory of his widow.

"For of course, while I 'm sorry as possible for her," thought conscientious Betty, "I could n't bear to believe that my sister would marry a man whom she did n't care about, for the sake of his wealth! Nor, if she did care about him once, that she could forget him so readily."

And as she pondered these things in the stillness of her own room, her eye went with a softened glance over the walls and brackets, rich with the striped and carved and gold-wrought souvenirs of poor Hector.

She had felt, at first, a little shuddering curiosity

about the fate of her kind brother-in-law; and as Christina was silent upon that theme, she questioned her mother, with some hesitation.

"I think there is not much to be told about it," Mrs. Karlsen answered. "Your sister seems to avoid dwelling on those painful reminiscences, and I understand her feeling. She gave me, however, a general account of the circumstances — all, indeed, that I should need to know. He was exposed to the contagion, as I told you, while travelling up the Gulf toward Muscat; and the symptoms appeared on his return to Bombay, where he had left your sister. He put himself instantly in charge of physicians, without — most fortunately — without having seen her; we should be so thankful for that! Fancy the poor child's distress! and all the people in Bombay were so alarmed at reports that the disease was approaching from the north. Her maid was frightened almost to illness; but she stayed there till the last; and then poor Christina made her way back to France as soon as possible. It makes me tremble now to think of the danger she was in!"

Betty trembled in sympathy, and gave a sigh from the bottom of her heart to the memory of the unfortunate.

"But about her money affairs, mamma. Of course she is well provided for?"

"Oh, perfectly. Yes, indeed; Hector had already given quite a little fortune into her hands, unconditionally. She told me as much as that, of her own accord. About his property in France I can't say;

I have not felt like inquiring into such things. But her comfort is assured, in any case."

Christina seemed to really enjoy being at home again, in her own peculiar way, which was not a demonstrative one. She was unusually amiable to her sister, and evidently felt that the extreme duties of affection had been discharged when she had filled Betty's boxes with treasures from her own exhaustless trunks.

Betty did her best to please and interest her, thinking that the change to quiet Lyme was very abrupt for a young lady whose recent life had been so full of enjoyments. With an idea that charitable pursuits were adapted, as a general thing, to persons under bereavement, she tried to coax Christina into visiting some of her village poor folks; but it instantly appeared that such treatment would not answer in her sister's case.

"It 's very nice of you to go looking after the poor things, Betty," Mrs. Lecomte observed, glancing at the girl's well-packed rush basket; "very nice, and I hope they appreciate it. But I have n't a talent for that kind of thing, as you have; and I should n't be of the least use, I 'm very positive. It *does* require a special talent, you know."

That was beyond doubt; and Betty wondered that she had n't thought of it before, as she looked at the charming figure in trailing black, its little feet propped on cushions, its white hands curled softly and helplessly together. Christina's hands had always a peculiarly helpless look, as if made of

velvet after the finest model, solely to be caressed and to display the "newest style of setting."

"But you will come to church with me to-morrow, won't you, Christina? I 'm sure you will like Mr. Goodwillie."

"Is that the Episcopalian clergyman?" inquired Christina. "I thought it was another name that Miss Harrod mentioned."

"Oh, she was talking of Mr. Musgrove. He is the rector, — but we don't attend St. Agatha's. Mamma prefers going to the old Baptist church."

"The Baptist church! Dear me, how — But that is rather extraordinary of mamma. Is St. Agatha's that cunning little church with creepers growing up the sides, that Dr. Brand drove us past yesterday?"

"Yes, that is Mr. Musgrove's church. It was Mr. Harrod's enterprise, at the first."

"I am going there," murmured Christina sleepily. "I always attend the Church service, if possible. You had better come with me, I think."

Betty was not to be drawn away from her favorite pastor, however; though she confessed to liking the Church service very much. She persisted for once in teasing her sister, until the latter finally compromised by going half a day to the "cunning little church with creepers," and the other half — if anywhere — to the white-walled and green-shuttered Baptist sanctuary. The tone of St. Agatha's seemed, after all, better "adjusted" to the gracious figure in sable which came regularly by and by, with its swift

bending steps, and went through its devout movements with such beautiful absorption.

She sat sometimes with Mrs. Brand, and sometimes with the Harrods, and after a while selected a seat of her own. The gold and purple window-lights seemed to find a new point of attraction; and sometimes neglected the ecclesiastical head to come shooting down upon the Mary Stuart bonnet, whose long veil wrapped its owner's drooping shoulders so gracefully. The ecclesiastical eye sometimes followed the recreant lights, as if trying to account for their defection.

Mr. Musgrove was very fond of society, even in its quietest form. His calls at the Karlsens' had always been so frequent that he could not with propriety make them any more so after Christina came home. But he seemed not to find them less agreeable since that event.

"Every one appears to have a high opinion of him, Christina," said Betty, in a speculative tone. "Do you really like him better than Mr. Goodwillie?"

"He is much more polished," Christina said. "Naturally, one would prefer him for one's regular pastor." And presently, following her peculiar train of thought, she observed, with condescension: "Why does n't Mr. Goodwillie wear cuffs, I wonder?"

"Why, he does," exclaimed Betty, indignantly. "They do slip up sometimes, to be sure," she added, on reflection. "He is a little careless about himself, I know. But then, one does n't mind how one's minister dresses, if he 's good."

"Does n't one?" said Christina. "Mr. Musgrove is very particular about his cuffs." This merit might have covered a multitude of sins, for the fastidious Mrs. Lecomte.

But Mr. Musgrove gave no signs of needing apology more than his brethren, unless one should lay that charge to his displays of independence which so perplexed the villagers. His secular bearing was that of a well-conducted, vigorous young man, as fond of jollity as a priest; with a fine baritone voice and a great deal of general knowingness. Mr. Goodwillie, indeed, would have made but a plain figure beside him in a fashionable drawing-room.

Mrs. Karlsen always welcomed him in her kindly manner. She thought it well to encourage some society as a mild and allowable distraction for Christina, now that the first half of the mourning period was getting toward its end. Her large sitting-room and the music-room opening out of it took on an unusually populated air of an evening, when perhaps Mr. Musgrove stepped in with a book of glees under his arm; and Rose Harrod's pretty face was there, too; and very often the Brands, quite as charming as any younger folks; and Mr. Jack Leavitt, pale and romantic of feature, generally supporting himself with languor upon an end of the piano, during Betty's performances. Jack Leavitt was one of the lions of the neighborhood; an only son with very great expectations, whose nominal pursuit was Law, and who was understood to pursue it so very hard during the winter that the whole sum-

mer's rest was necessary to "get him on his pins" for a renewal of the pursuit. Whether he ever caught it or not his friends considered a matter of minor importance, in view of his future possessions.

He met a great many brilliant girls during his winters in the city, but failed to appreciate them on comparison with Miss Betty in her rural niche. He was a "nice fellow," and not at all ill-looking; nevertheless Betty received all his attentions with a mild unconsciousness or an absent good-nature that often caused Mr. Leavitt to feel himself the least of mortals.

Christina's crapes did not cast the slightest shade upon the party; perhaps the bright-colored head that crowned them offset the gloom of the black draperies. And among them all Betty in her white dress went about as quietly as moonlight, with a frequent smile or hand-pat for Dr. Brand, whose dark eyes liked to watch the pleasant innocence of her face. He thought oftener now of a Madonna than of the royal portrait at Rosenborg, as he looked at Betty with her soft hair drawn away from her forehead and tucked behind her ears in yellow plaits. That was the way she wore it now; a pretty way, giving a quaint and demure aspect to her small head.

"And Axel," mused the Doctor, fragmentarily — "Axel will be here before this time next summer, I hope."

Which reflection was also passing at the same moment, and at many other moments, through his

Madonna's flaxen head, though the Doctor was not aware of it.

"The glees went well to-night. Mamma has a voice yet," said Christina, sitting in the candlelight with her hair in a curly cascade upon her shoulders, when the two sisters had gone up into their room. "And Mr. Musgrove's is a really splendid baritone. As for Jack Leavitt, it 's not of the faintest use his trying to sing and keep his eyes pinned on you at the same time. The result is simply painful."

"I could dispense with his trying to do either," said Betty, covering herself likewise with a cascade of hair, far-flowing and as devoid of curl as the moonbeams.

"Jack is very nice," added Christina. "I don't see how you can help liking him when you think what a valuable property he 'll come into, one of these days."

"Why," said simple Betty, very much amused, "what difference does that make? I suppose he might be quite disagreeable, and come into his property all the same. Not that I think he is, particularly. But it does n't signify to me, either way."

"I know it is not as if you were a poor girl," proceeded the fair reasoner; "still I never was in favor of disregarding opportunities; and of course we all admit that *more* money is better than *less* money. And you know the fable of 'The Fisherman and the little Fish,' I dare say — moral, 'take it' is as good again as 'you shall have it.'"

Betty did not make the application of this prudent

maxim at once; when she did it struck her as rather coarse, in spite of its classic origin. But it was not an unusual thing for Christina to say something that jarred a bit on the younger girl's sensibility. Notwithstanding that, Betty admired her very much always, and condoned many a little unpleasantness; and was beauty-worshipper enough to have pardoned worse grievances to such a pair of dark-blue eyes and so coaxing a voice.

There was but one expression ever seen on her sister's face which she did not enjoy; and that appeared but seldom. It was a peculiar smile, which raised one corner of her mouth higher than the other, and gave almost a sinister look to her fair face. It came sometimes after one of those abstracted fits which seized Christina at long intervals; Betty called it privately "her uneven smile." She was very glad her sister did not use it on common occasions.

Her chief concern at this time was lest Christina should become bored and depressed by the want of diversity in their country life.

"Are you sure you feel as contented here as you could anywhere now, Christina dear?" she would ask, hanging observantly round her sister, if she noticed the distant look coming into her blue eyes.

Oh, yes, Christina was quite contented; they need not, any of them, worry about her. She seemed, indeed, in perfectly good spirits as a general thing, and made herself very charming to all their visitors. Aunt Karlsen wrote often and persuasively during the winter for her to come to the city; Chris-

tina sent back persistent thanks and indefinite promises. But in the spring she suddenly gave out that she had accepted, and would spend a few weeks in the city, just to satisfy Aunt Bertha.

Betty saw in this a confirmation of her fear that Christina suffered from monotony. But that was not the real reason why the young lady chose to go away, just then. It was because Axel Brand was coming home next month, and it suited her better to be absent on that occasion.

She had discovered very early that it is pleasanter to arrive from abroad and be received by one's friends, the centre of importance, than to help administer such welcome from the tame standpoint of the stay-at-home. So, as Christina always selected for herself the pleasantest experiences, even in the minor affairs of life, she packed a little box-trunk and gracefully took wing from Lyme.

CHAPTER IX.

MAMSELL.

ALL around the Danish capital run the "ramparts;" high, well-lined with trees, picturesque, and fearfully breezy. It is a very favorite walk with the citizens, along the ramparts. It was a favorite walk with Axel from the first of his living in Copenhagen. He liked nothing better than to stroll there on bright chilly afternoons, past the trees and huge windmills; perhaps thinking sometimes, with a little hidden yearning, that the same wind — figuratively speaking — that whirled their great sails and tossed his brown hair, had tossed his father's black locks in bygone days.

This same promenade had also been a favorite with two other individuals for many a year — for something like fifteen years — before Axel ever set foot in Denmark. The older of this pair was a solid, middle-aged woman, always dressed in the manner of North Holland peasantry, with a very plain but amiable face under her quaint Friesland headgear. Holding by her hand or skirts used to trot a little thin, extraordinary-looking girl, whose eyes were dark and soft like a rabbit's, and who had a quantity of Albino-white hair that stood out in the

wind as if she had been electrified. The little girl called her companion "Sigbrid," sometimes "Nurse." The woman called her charge "Fredrika," or "Mamsell Fredrika," as ordered by the child's mother. Later, when the girl had grown tall and walked sedately beside the nurse instead of hanging to her fingers, there was no mother at home to insist upon the "Mamsell;" and good Sigbrid often dropped it in the familiarity of her affection. Fredrika made no protest, for she loved her nurse, even more than the mother who had died, and who had been well known before her marriage by the name of Else Oersted.

Sigbrid was a peasant from an island close by Copenhagen. She always retained the costume of her colony, but had become very much improved and instructed through living in the Lindholm household. She had a busy time of it with her charge, for the first years of that little person's existence. Fredrika was a queer combination; sometimes a wild capering thing, crazy for mischief; again, a sympathetic thing, crying dolorously over somebody's hurt; very often an angry thing, quite ready to scratch or snap at offenders. An even-handed justice in the person of Sigbrid kept her straight, and saved her many a scolding from the sharp-tongued mamma Lindholm. Mamsell could always be managed by means of stories, and no true Dane ever wanted for those.

The pair might be seen any pleasant morning, taking their familiar walk on the ramparts; one skipping, the other plodding in square-toed, solemn en-

joyment. Fredrika loved to be jostled about by the wind; she loved to stare at the giant windmills, mounting guard on the bastions like whirling dervishes of sentinels. She had one naughty habit: if passers-by attracted her notice she would tear away from her nurse and go flirting along on her toes behind them, copying their gait and carriage with the most ludicrous faithfulness. Sigbrid was always equal to these emergencies. She clutched her white-haired charge, and while steering her along in the proper course, recited to her the following ghastly tale, as told by the oldest inhabitant.

"When this wall of earth was being built, Mamsell Fredrika, this very wall on which we stand, it suddenly began to cave and crumble; and the more they piled up the earth the more it caved and crumbled, till they knew not what to do. And they went to an old woman who knew everything; and she said, 'Your mound will never cease to cave and crumble until a living child has been buried under it!' So then, Mamsell, they built a little chamber of bricks under the earth, and lighted it with candles, and trimmed it with flowers, and put in the centre a table set out with sugarplums and cakes, and toys of every kind, and they placed around it a circle of dolls, all beautifully dressed. But they left only a small opening for a doorway, just big enough for a child to enter. And then the master-mason found a little girl, about the age of Mamsell,— who had probably run away from her nurse and mocked people in the streets — and asked her to

come with him and see the new babyhouse. So she went, and looked in, and was wild with joy, it was so beautiful! and she sat down and forgot everything in playing with the dolls, among the flowers and sugar-plums. Then the masons took their bricks and mortar, and went to work very fast and quietly, and filled in the little doorway behind her as she played. So after that the mounds went up without any more trouble, and grew into these fine walls where we are walking."

Sigbrid believed this story of the ramparts implicitly, as many of her countrymen do; and she had a peculiar gift for relating such horrid legends. Fredrika always listened to the first of it gaping, with expectant shivers running down her back; and when the unfortunate infant was securely bricked up, she flung herself with a howl into Sigbrid's ample skirts, and was subdued for that day.

There were two younger brothers in the family, Max and little Albert, who were very quick about growing old enough to torment their sister. Max used to call her "goblin," because of her flying white hair and sharp face; his brotherly attentions often maddened poor Mamsell until she shrieked herself nearly into fits. Then Sigbrid would come to the rescue, and take the child away, sometimes — as a great treat — to her own home on the Amager Island. This was the height of felicity to Fredrika, when she found herself crossing the little bridge to Christianshavn, and when they came in sight of the settlement where everybody wore flaunting skirts and silver or-

naments and headdresses just like Sigbrid's. It was heavenly to sit and eat apples-and-milk from an earthen bowl with Sigbrid's people, in one of the neat cottages hung over with strings of onions, dried fish, and similar decorations! Nothing could surpass this unless it was a cattle-fair; Mamsell thought if she could attend a cattle-fair the summit of pleasure would have been reached!

When she was twelve years of age she was called upon to fill her mother's empty place. She seemed to grow suddenly into a responsible person; learned to manage a household and servants; and soon made her father happier, it is safe to say, than he had yet been since marrying "the Oersted." She always remained the same in disposition, of course; liable to sudden freaks; tempestuous; both in anger and affection a perfect child of nature; naïve and unspoiled as a peasant-girl. In looks she soon began to improve: the Albino-hair turned a prettier shade, the rabbit-eyes grew smaller and more human-looking, and Fredrika was presently pointed out on her walks as a beautiful young lady. The brothers observed it and became more respectful; Max called her "goblin" no more. Everything seemed to be growing pleasanter and cheerier about the family; it was almost as if — alas, poor Else! — as if some malign influence had been removed.

And Fredrika grew and grew, always under the devoted care of Sigbrid, and took up her part in the gay social life as her mother had done before her. But it was a different repute that this young girl bore

— when the social voice spoke of her it said: "she is a good girl, and a worthy one; rather too unrestrained and passionate, something of a hoyden, but on the whole an innocent and well-deserving girl." And the University men and the garrison men, who must have somebody to run after, ran after Fredrika as their predecessors ran after the Oersted; and she amused herself simply and heartily with them, hurting nobody any more than she could help. Sigbrid, who had grown very worldly-wise by this time, often smiled, well pleased, to see what a child her young mistress remained as she counted year after year toward twenty.

Then Max took his first term at the University, and Albert went away to school, so that Sigbrid and her mistress had much time to themselves, and made things uncommonly pleasant for the young men when they came home. It was very early in Max's first year that he made acquaintance with a young American, or Danish-American — a somewhat homesick one, if the truth must be told — named Axel Brand; and brought him home for a visit to his father's house.

This was an agreeable variation from Axel's solitary tramps on the city-walls when he wanted to get outside of the University. Although he had been brought up to speak the language as naturally as English, and the national flag was as familiar to him as the stars and stripes — for had he not hoisted and lowered it many a time on the roof at home? — there was a great strangeness all about him; and the

change from the quiet nest at Lyme was as sudden as complete.

The senior Max Lindholm was a stout, fatherly fellow, with a sweet blue eye which beamed the warmest kindness on the second edition of his old classmate. He told Axel a great many stories of the Doctor at college; said again and again how fond he had been of him; and begged the young man to make himself perfectly at home in the house. Fredrika was very cordial and frolicsome, and made a pleasing figure against the background of her little window-gardens. It was such a quaint, pretty, well-ordered interior, so novel to Axel, and yet so homelike. Those flourishing little "bow-pots," too, reminded him of his mother's indoor gardening at home; though they were different sorts of flowers, rather antiquated and all sweet-scented, except the small Dutch tulips that their owner valued so highly.

Sigbrid, risen from nurse to housekeeper, delighted the young man's eye with her picturesque costume and comfortable old face; he longed to make a sketch of her, but was not draughtsman enough to do it. He went to a little shop he had seen, where they make a specialty of such jewelry as her people wore; and bought a stock of silver chains and ornaments with which he decked out the old lady like an idol. Sigbrid laughed heartily, but she was not without her vanities, and Axel became her prime favorite. She smiled on him so broadly; she repaired to the kitchen and stirred him up such extraordinary little eel-soups with cherries, and other marvels which

would have made his hair stand on end at home, but which he took with great readiness here, as local coloring.

Young Max was used to having his friends well treated in his father's house, yet the favor shown to this latest guest was rather beyond anything in his experience. It was gratifying to him, and on the whole he could not wonder at it. They all felt that Axel was returning measure for measure when he made the house gay with his American songs, or entertained them for hours about "manners and customs in the United States," all the family sitting around him meanwhile in innocent astonishment.

They did the honors of the city for him in fine style.

"I know," Fredrika said, "the Herr Brand is impatient to visit Helsingoer; it seems to be our Danish Mecca for all the strangers that come here. They all rush to see Hamlet's tomb, and the place where the ghost walked. Of course, father, we shall take him there?"

"Certainly, my child," said the senior Max, promptly. "Organize the expedition as soon as you please. I will join you, and will even agree to personate the ghost for our young friend's benefit."

And they all laughed dutifully, for Papa Lindholm was far from being of ghostly proportions.

"Hamlet's tomb," to be sure, was one of the places that Axel most wished to visit, being a Shaksperean bookworm of the very enthusiastic kind. His father had often explained to him that his enthusiasm

would be thrown away upon a "Hamlet's tomb" constructed by sharp residents to get rid of persistent tourists. But Axel was resolved to let no such impertinent facts interfere with his romantic enjoyment of the scene. They went up by steamer to Helsingoer — better recognized as Elsinore — and there dined and passed a night, so as to walk the famous platform, like Hamlet's sentry, by "glimpses of the moon." The fortress-castle of Kronborg, built on the very scene of the royal phantom's promenades, had risen slowly before their eyes as they steamed along the Sound: an object of strange, lonesome beauty, with its square brooding towers and central spire, in Axel's fancy a type of the weird Northern charm to which he was falling an easy victim. But when they descended to it at moonrise from their hotel, and stood in its massive shadow, its charm seemed to have gained something of the awesome for him. He wished every one of his companions had stayed behind in the city, so that he might take it in more poetically. Fredrika would persist in romping, and Max in spouting lines from the drama; while Axel pensively moved about among the grassy stones of the court, and gazed up at the turrets and decorated clock-tower.

They patrolled the esplanade, and looked over to the misty cliffs of Kullen and the pharos casting its warning ray upon the gloomy waters.

"'*Look, my lord, it comes!*'" Max broke out with an attitude, as something moved from a dark angle into the shining space.

It was merely a stout British tourist, who had come like them, with more romance than his outer man betrayed, for purposes of moonlight contemplation. He glared at them in deep offense as they all laughed irrepressibly; and stumbled away haughtily toward the Marienlyst hotel.

"I would like to skip you over that cliff into the Sound," said Axel to young Lindholm. "You are spoiling the whole effect; you are perfectly barbarous!"

"I have been just as bad," said Fredrika, penitently. "It *is* a shame, when you are getting your first impressions of it. Max, behave yourself!"

"Have n't we done sentry duty long enough?" said mischievous Max, turning up the collar of his coat with a shiver. "Which am I, Horatio or Marcello? 'It is a nipping and an eager air.' I long to get under cover somewhere; and I believe my good father is perishing for a glass of schnapps."

"Well, come along, then," said Axel patiently. "Better schnapps at Marienlyst than sentiment in the company of Harlequin! Come on, giddy youngster!"

They stopped before re-entering the hotel for a look at the "tomb" with its uncompromising little shaft. "There have been three of them," Fredrika observed; "but this is the oldest one, and as the guides say, '*the most authentic!*'"

"Three tombs!" said Axel blankly. "Did he take so much room? Where are the other two?"

"Well, they say the English visitors dug them up

with their jacknives and carried them off piecemeal — I suppose for bric-a-brac. When this is used up we shall try to have a better one."

"O Albion, what a guy art thou abroad!" exclaimed Axel, with an irate laugh. "My friends, I have had enough of Hamlet for the present. I request as a favor that you will not take me to any more places with poetic associations. I shall be only fit for Tivoli and such frivolous resorts after this."

But they did take him to many a place with associations, and told him scores of the charming legends with which their country is sown, and which have been such a valuable stock-in-trade to Mr. Marryatt and other travellers. Axel put some of these in his home letters occasionally, with rather sparing accounts of his new friends. He was not a diffuse correspondent; and then perhaps he had, or thought he had, a reason for some reserve. Among the other legends one had come to him — in a roundabout way, as those things do — wherein his father's name was coupled with that of a lady who had afterwards become the Frue Lindholm, and whose likeness now hung in Max's sleeping room. Older people of the city, their memories awakened by the sight of young Brand, revived the old gossip about his father, repeating it in their own versions; and when their juniors had learned it by heart it soon reached the ears of Axel. He was little surprised at it, but — not having lived so long in the world for nothing — took it simply as a common experience. He listened

curiously to everything that was to be heard about Else Oersted, whose strange elfish figure still had a vivid existence in the minds of many Copenhageners. He disliked her face in the picture. He thought she must have had a terribly defective taste not to admire his father, but it struck him too as a very fortunate thing. Not knowing how much the Doctor had been affected by that affair, Axel was not sure that he would be pleased to hear of his son's intimacy in this household. The young man knew that there was a well-grounded friendship between his father and Herr Lindholm; but he had an idea that it would be wise to avoid writing Fredrika's name too often in his letters.

As for Fredrika, she was quite ignorant of the floating gossip. She had always been a comfortably unromantic young person. The Copenhagen youth represented to her so many jolly *fantoccini*, with various rôles to play, and always ready to play them for her entertainment. Sigbrid, aware of this, left the young lady to manage her own affairs without interference; and might have continued to rejoice in this security but for a new trick of her lively Mamsell. It was something so rare to see Fredrika sitting still and engaged with her thoughts, that the old housekeeper, having found her thus several times, anxiously inquired into it.

"Why, nothing ails me, Sigbrid," said the young lady, rather pettishly. "I was only thinking. That is no bad sign, I hope."

"But what thoughts can keep my dear Mamsell

quiet so long, with such a sad wrinkle between her eyebrows?" coaxed the guardian, stealing an affectionate brown hand over Fredrika's flossy hair.

"Oh, I was thinking about Herr Axel, Sigbrid. What do you suppose he will do when his studies here are finished?"

"Naturally, Mamsell, he will be apt to return to his home in America."

"Well, I knew that, too. That accounts for the wrinkles, Sigbrid. I don't want him to go."

"Ah, neither do I, Mamsell. Such a kind disposition! Such high spirits, and at the same time so gentle! Oh yes, I shall miss him too, and that very much."

"But yet not as I shall, good Sigbrid. He must not go! Help me to keep him!"

"Well, my Fredrika," said Sigbrid, jestingly, "I don't see how we can manage it, unless thou canst contrive to marry him."

"Very well; that 's just what I want to do."

"May the Lord preserve us, Mamsell!" Sigbrid murmured, falling into a chair; "thou art not in earnest?"

"Then I never shall be. Don't act so, nurse! For mercy's sake, am I not old enough to know what I want?"

"Ah, my dear child, *he* is too young! Why, reflect —he is hardly the age of our Max; and think of the difference between you two!"

Fredrika's temper flew up, and her black eyes snapped through angry tears.

"You don't care anything for me at all. You are hatefully unkind, Sigbrid!" she exclaimed, jumping up and going off to the window with her back to her companion.

Sigbrid sat smoothing her great white apron over her knees, trying to be self-contained; but the sight of her dearest crying and tapping disconsolately on the pane was too much for her. "Now, now, my best one!" she protested, hurrying to put her arms around that spoilt young lady. "Don't turn away from thy Sigbrid. What can I do to please thee? Tell me anything; it shall be done, that it shall!"

And so she petted and coaxed, and submitted her velvet bodice to be streaked with briny tears, until the cloud had passed over, and Fredrika had mopped her eyes with some of her silky hair. Then the freakish creature, having repentantly rubbed her damp cheek over Sigbrid's brown knuckles, leaned up against the window-sash and thought in silence, staring at her flowers.

"The Herr Brand is not betrothed?" suggested the old woman cautiously.

"No; that can't be!" flashed out Fredrika. "If I thought so, I should like to choke her! But I am sure he is not. I have heard him speak of a little friend at home who grew up with him; but he did not say much about her, and — no, I am quite certain there is nothing of the kind."

"Sigbrid!" she said by and by, transferring her light weight suddenly to the housekeeper's shoulder.

"Dearest Mamsell?"

"Your people in Amager know so many things — Did you never hear of charms to make people fond of you? Something you put in their food or drink, you know, at table."

"It seems to me that I *have* heard stories of such things," Sigbrid answered, doubtfully.

"I 'm sure there ought to be," said Fredrika, with simplicity. "Well, Sigbrid, could n't you — could n't you find out about it directly, and get me a charm to put in the eel-soup when Herr Axel comes again to dine?"

The old woman gave up at this proposition, and laughed until her breath was quite spent, and her mistress very near crying again.

"Bless thee, my Fredrika!" she exclaimed. "I don't think there is anything of that kind to be had of the wisest woman in Amager! The best charm is my Mamsell's face and eyes — that I know. These are thy mother's eyes, child; and a strong enough charm they used to be in her day!" nodded old Sigbrid, sighing.

But Fredrika did not feel much confidence in that charm; and time seemed to show that she was right. Axel went merrily on with his course at the University, making friends everywhere, and yet showing no signs of regret as the graduation time approached.

And at last that was over. Young Brand and young Lindholm came off with honors. The latter set about making up his mind to the military duties which every young Dane must fulfil; the former prepared for the brief continental trip which he allowed

himself before starting for home. Fredrika was completely wretched, and had barely spirit enough left to avoid showing it in the most abject manner.

"But I shall not say good-by to him," she told Sigbrid. "When he comes to take leave, mind — I 'm ill! I shan't see him; I am not equal to it."

She carried out her intention, taking refuge in her room when he arrived; Sigbrid's fib about her health was not far from being truth. Axel was much disappointed not to exchange good-byes with his lively friend. He obtained a rare little Holland tulip, which he knew she had long wished for, and sent it to her as a farewell token before leaving for Hamburg. Fredrika had hysterics over the tulip, and sorely frightened her nurse.

"Now," said she recklessly, thrusting away Sigbrid's tender hands, "I don't care what I do! I will marry the Councillor Ekstrom."

"The good angels watch over us!" cried Sigbrid, dismayed. "My Mamsell would not take the old Councillor, surely!"

"*Old!* So you do think I am not too old for him? You said I was too old for Herr Brand."

"No, no, my dearest; I said the Herr Brand was too young for thee!"

But this subtle distinction had no effect on poor Mamsell. "I shall marry the Councillor Ekstrom," she repeated, shutting her red eyelids on the world.

Sigbrid shook her head bodingly; for experience had taught her that what Fredrika threatened to do was very likely to be done.

CHAPTER X.

"A TRAMP FROM COPENHAGEN."

HAVE you noticed, Betty, what a vivid green there is on the grass this summer, and how unusually thick the foliage is all about here?"

Mrs. Brand made this remark to Betty as they walked by way of the little footpath over to the stone cottage. It was morning. Axel was expected in the afternoon.

Betty laughed a sympathetic and playful little laugh.

"Yes, dear," said she blithely, "it is quite remarkable; and to think of its happening so just this season, when he is coming! It is entirely on his account, of course — so that when he sees his home again, after so many years, it will be wearing its very prettiest dress."

"Well, but I really think it is the fact, and you may laugh if you choose, Miss," said the expectant mother, turning her smiling eyes around on the rich grass and the interlacing branches. "I don't believe it is *altogether* happiness that makes the face of the earth look so bright to me this summer. But no doubt it makes me readier to see and to feel. How shall I feel, I wonder, when I look at my boy again,

my little brown-headed boy? Do you know, my dear, in all the pictures he has sent me from abroad, his face — even with that big, odd-looking moustache — always turns after a minute into the same little face that used to look up from my knee but a few years since. I think I shall never be able to see him in any other way."

"I do not think his eyes can ever change," said Betty; and they passed between the Thorvaldsen figures and went into the shady hall of the stone cottage.

The Doctor had gone over with his meerschaum and his happiness to have a social puff in Mr. Karlsen's sitting-room, and talk about his boy. Betty followed Mrs. Brand over the house, and surveyed all the preparations, from the great pot of Japan lilies in Axel's little bow-window to the pantry-shelves set out delightfully with dainty things, which Axel's mamma showed in great satisfaction. "He was always a bit of an epicure, was my boy; and these are all things that he likes especially well."

And then Betty walked home again in the trodden path, singing under her breath as she held her light skirt up from the dew. She felt so light-hearted; and everything around her had undergone the magic change which one feels in a state of high anticipation. The soft airs which came puffing through the leaves were like airs blown from some other world, full of faint reminders as of something long forgotten. But what had she forgotten? Surely nothing that ever concerned Axel. She recalled the fairy-

tales of her childhood; she remembered "how the Prince came home," and she said to herself that it was exactly the same now as when he came before. There was much of the child and the dreamer yet in Betty.

"I understand how it is that Mrs. Brand sees the grass and leaves so bright," she said, stopping under an apple-tree. "And they look so to me. It is all because of the Prince." She laughed, glancing about with a face of gay wonder. "Yet the sky has clouded over a trifle. I hope it is not going to rain," she said, listening to the soft chuckle of robins in the apple-tree.

It did not rain, but the sky kept its steady grayness all day long. A drop or two fell on Betty's forehead as she slipped out at dusk on the doorsteps to look over at the stone cottage. There was not much to be seen there, the night was so clouded and the darkness of the trees so dense; but she could see the lights gleaming through the curtained casements, and now and then shadows moving briskly across. She knew that he was there; and she reflected that of course they would want him all to themselves that night, and that perhaps he would be coming "across lots" early next morning. So she sat contentedly nestling on the step, watching the lights and hearing the sleepy hum of the crickets till she nearly dropped into a doze.

Something startled her to her feet presently: a shape moved under the trees between her eyes and the lights.

"What is that?" she called out in a startled voice, and drew back toward the door.

"A tramp, miss; all the way from Copenhagen," replied the shade, advancing hastily. "What are you doing here in the rain, *Jomfru* Betty?"

And *Jomfru* Betty, struck speechless, seized him by the hands and burst into a wild and incoherent murmur of welcome.

"What is going on out here?" said Mr. Karlsen, putting his head through the doorway. "Whom have you there, Betty? Not Axel! Bless me! come in, come in, my dear boy!"

"Just for a moment, sir," Axel said, in his familiar voice, shaking hands vigorously. "You are all to come and celebrate the Prodigal's return to-morrow, and my mother said I was not to spoil the occasion by running over here first. But I was impatient to see you all. They will be after me in a moment if they find me out. Where is Mrs. Karlsen?"

"Here, dear, here!" cried the lady, hurrying into the hall. "How delighted we are to see you, Axel! But I should hardly recognize you if it were not for your voice."

"Indeed? am I so changed?" said the young man, passing his hand over his heavy moustache with a smile. He stood up with rather a grand air as he talked to them, and did not seem displeased that they found him altered. Betty watched him with all her eyes; she thought, indeed, that he was greatly changed, and at first she was sorry for it. There was a foreign air about his clothes, his man-

ner; he had even a little foreign accent, as might have been expected. But as he talked, the old looks came back by degrees into his face, in spite of the big moustache and the dignity; and there were the pleasant brown eyes, just as she remembered them, although at considerably greater altitude, and above much wider shoulders.

"And now I must get back," said he, after a few moments more under the hall lamps. "It is really absurd to appear and disappear in this way, like a ghost with a pressing engagement. But they claim me at home, you know, this evening. You will all come to-morrow, mind, for the afternoon."

And he descended with a spring into the darkness.

The return of the Prince had taken place; and it was all over in ten minutes, and Betty was left bewildered and fluttered, and delighted, as though he had been indeed a pleasant ghost.

"The dear boy is looking so well!" said her mother, with enthusiasm. "How strong and tall he has grown!"

"A little dandified," Mr. Karlsen added. "That's only natural. But he's a fine fellow, and he'll get over it in time."

They held high carnival among themselves next day at the stone cottage.

Mrs. Brand had ordered an astonishing dinner for them, and presided over it with her eyes as bright as brown diamonds. Dr. Brand followed his son about, finding no limit to the questions he wanted to ask on

the subject of Denmark, and the colleges, and all the places thereabout which were so familiar to him in his young years. He was living those years over in Axel's stories of the old University and the dearly-remembered city lying around it. They sat after dinner in the library, where the head of Andersen was niched; and Axel told them how he had seen the great man, and how he had recognized him instantly from the marble face at home, it was so very like.

"And did you see the tomb of Thorvaldsen, Axel?" Betty asked.

Oh, yes; he had seen that many a time; he used to like to go there and study the statues and bas-reliefs, and see them all standing guard around the sleeping head and hands that created them. It was a fine idea, a noble idea, that mausoleum, Axel thought. Betty noticed a certain earnestness in his voice, a flushing of his face as he spoke of Art; and she was pleased, for it confirmed her thoughts of him.

"And were you never lonesome, dear, at any time?" inquired Mrs. Karlsen. "Did you find pleasant society enough to keep you happy?"

"Oh yes; oh, very pleasant! No, I was never at all lonesome," said Axel, laughing a little, and glancing at his father.

Dr. Brand laughed, too; he remembered very well what roaring squads of University boys used to take their ease in the inns about Copenhagen, when he was young, and one of them.

"We used to go out of town a good deal — parties of us," said Axel, looking as if he somewhat regretted those jolly expeditions. "A lot of us went out to Fanoe once, to see the amber-gatherers. It 's an island, you know — barren little place; but we made a jolly time of it. It was great fun to see the natives scudding about in the sand like long-legged spiders — sans-culottes, the boys called them."

"Ah, I remember," said his father, in great enjoyment. "Upon my word, sir, it can't be more than three or four weeks since I was there myself! Eh, Karlsen?"

"Yes, I suppose the world does n't wag so rapidly in that corner as it does over here," said Mr. Karlsen, who was listening with a livelier interest than common.

"And Tivoli, sir," went on Axel, well pleased with his office of story-teller: "the prettiest garden in the world, I really believe. It puts the Paris gardens to the blush, indeed it does. I was there half my time in summer. I should like to see Betty at Tivoli, staring at the colored arches and illuminations! It 's a regular fairy garden, Betty, such as we used to imagine when we were small. You walk about in long avenues, between rainbows of lanterns, with fire-works shooting up in the distance, and you hear orchestras playing beautifully — and there are bazars and little coffee-houses twinkling all over with lamps, quite dazzling. And you go along by the canal, and there are boats with colored lights gliding up and down. How many times I 've loafed about that

canal, of summer nights, watching the pretty colors skimming around on the dark water!"

"How picturesque!" exclaimed all the feminine listeners, quite enchanted.

"Like Venice, I should fancy," said Mrs. Brand, who had been there once on her wedding tour.

"It is like Venice, rather," assented Axel. "Ah, yes, I 'm an enthusiast now about the old country. My father can't help being satisfied with me on that head; can you, papa? Do you remember the Holstein woods, sir? how beautiful they are in spring, with a shower of green all over the beech-boughs, and the cuckoo calling through them here and there? Young Lindholm and I — your old friend's son, sir — used to wander about in them by the hour. Lindholm had a little brother at Kiel; and whenever we ran down to see him, we always took a tramp in the woods before going back. He had a botanical turn of mind, had the young one; and Max is an entomologist; so we used to go mooning about after wild-flowers and all sorts of little reptiles, and I furnished the poetical selections for the party and kept my hands clean."

"Just as I used to do with Max Lindholm, thirty years ago," said the Doctor, with a ruminative sigh. "Max's son! Is it possible? Looks like him, no doubt. Max was a tall, slight-bodied fellow, with fair hair, rather long, and a thin, romantic face" —

"He must have changed a good deal, sir," said Axel, laughing. "His face is as round as an Alkmaar cheese; and I should n't like to say how much

he measures around the waist. He was tremendously good to me on your account, and took me about with him everywhere."

"No doubt; no doubt. Old Max!" said the Doctor, gratefully. "Well I remember the Holstein wild-flowers! Tell me, my son, did you sometimes meet a little creeper, a small bright-blue flower trailing along under the trees, half out of sight"—

"*Aeren-priis*—I know the little blue fellow," said Axel. "Great pet of Lindholm's."

"And of mine. I used to get bunches of it," murmured the Doctor, with a sly glance at his wife—"great bunches of it, to lay at the feet of the stately Danish maidens, with whom it was a favorite. I recall poetry made on those occasions—'eyes bluer than the blossoms'—and so on—in which I may have been a trifle extravagant."

And little Mrs. Brand's brown eyes shot a twinkling menace at her husband, as she laughed and threatened him with her finger.

"'Tis rather late in the day to try and make me jealous," she nodded over her shoulder, starting to look after a tray of chocolate just brought in. Betty followed, to help her; but not a word of the hero's precious converse escaped her ear.

"Yes, indeed," Axel was going on, elongating himself comfortably in his chair, "there 's nothing like the flora of those woods! We generally took a basket with us on our tramps, and we seldom came back without a load of spoils for the *Jomfru* Fredrika's sitting-room."

"For — ah — H'm! yes, to be sure!" observed the Doctor, reflectively. "Max's daughter. Yes, I remember you mentioned her. Fredrika, eh? Is she pretty, sir?"

"Uncommonly," said Axel. "She is a blonde girl, with long, narrow, dark eyes and a great deal of light waving hair. One of the Copenhagen belles, in fact. She manages her father's house — and himself — admirably; has done so since she was twelve years old, when her mother died. She's the oldest child — several years older than Max. They are the souls of hospitality" — and the young man launched off into a long story about some of the entertainments which his friends had provided for him.

Betty took it all in as she moved around demurely with the chocolate-cups. Her golden hour had suddenly revealed an unexpected alloy. She was quite unconscious of it, but from that time on she was subject to a vigorous aversion for the type of beauty represented by long and narrow dark eyes, in conjunction with light waving hair.

Axel's narrative slipped off his tongue like thread off a reel; he seemed to be enjoying himself greatly. Now it was all about an excursion he had made with the Lindholms to a seaside place called Klampenborg.

"Most charming watering-place I ever visited, upon my word it is! Has been called the Trouville of the Baltic. We dined there with open windows, and the sun blazing down outside like the tropics; and

there was the Baltic dancing up and down before us, as blue as this saucer. And we had the queerest bill of fare you ever saw — would have made your hair bristle with amazement, Mr. Karlsen. But the ride back by night was something to remember! The moonlight — such moonlight! — looked like frost all over the country: it was as still and white — and there were we all buried in furs, after that hot day — I had my immense shaggy coat, you know, with the collar; for the mercury had dropped away down to nowhere. That 's the way it does, in our dear Denmark springtime. You broil at noonday and you freeze at midnight — hey, papa? I remember Jomfru Fredrika insisted on riding backward, to let the moon shine in her face. And when we drove into the Dyrehaave (that 's the royal deer-preserve, you know) it was like going through an enchanted wood. We could hear all sorts of mysterious noises — rustlings and patterings of phantom feet; and then off under the trees we would see troops of shadows rushing away like frightened spirits. It was the deer flying from the sound of our wheels."

And so on, and so on, to the accompaniment of tinkling spoons and porcelain. Sir Lancelot returned from his adventures could have had no more absorbed and admiring listeners than Sir Axel reviewing his student-life and travels.

Betty said hardly a word all the evening. There seemed no occasion for saying anything, it was so complete and satisfactory, such a wonderful realization of a five years' dream — a fluent, handsome, easy,

six-foot realization, positively sitting right before her in the Doctor's biggest chair, and moving its brown eyes complacently around the ring of attentive faces.

"My dear Axel," said Mrs. Karlsen at last, glancing at the clock-face with a start, "you know we could listen to you all night, I'm sure, if you chose to talk" —

"The fact is, we have pretty nearly done that already," her husband struck in, breaking the circle. "Let me take my family home, Doctor, before the boy is quite exhausted."

And in a few moments they were out under the trees in the dark, whispering night, with a lantern flinging its rays along the moist well-trodden little path. Axel went on ahead of the others by Betty's side, swinging the lantern.

"The old path is wider than it used to be," said he, lighting it up. "Have the gardeners been at it?"

"Oh, no. I suppose we have trodden it wider, your mother and I — going back and forth to chat about you."

"So? Been talking me over steadily for five years, have you?"

"We had nothing better to do, we stay-at-homes, you know," said Betty, gaily. She was delightfully happy — as a small child to whom the promise of a day's picnic is as good as the promise of picnics without end. She glanced up, with a thrill of satisfaction, at the familiar brown head moving along with its chin in the air. What if he walked — as he un-

doubtedly did — with a slight air of condescension to the requirements of gravitation? If anybody had the right to carry his head high it was certainly Axel!

She ran up to her room after they had made their good-nights, and looked out of her window to watch the lantern go bobbing and winking back between the trees and finally disappear with a swoop. She heard shutting and barring of doors in the stone cottage; and presently a light twinkled out from the little upper casement where the Japan lilies had been placed. She looked at that for some time, with great contentment.

Then by-and-by a curious picture passed before her eyes, like a view in a magic-lantern. A wood, and a flying wagon with four muffled people in it; shadowy troops of forest-creatures wheeling away in alarm. A white, beautiful face leaning from its nest of furs, with hair tossed and silvery in the moonbeams that fell down through the branches. Then the slide closed; and there was simply darkness, with the little candle-ray across which an elm-tree now and then waved an intercepting arm.

"The Atlantic Ocean," murmured Betty, reviving some buried items of geographical wisdom as she let down the curtain — "the Atlantic Ocean measures about four thousand miles across at its widest point, and about nine hundred at its narrowest. And he is on *this* side of it at present."

This thought appeared to give her great pleasure

as she settled her yellow head into the pillow, before returning in dreams to the moonlit Deer-forest.

But Axel, sniffing æsthetically at the lilies as he worked off his boots, was not thinking of Fredrika Lindholm, nor indeed of any young person of her sex. His thoughts were dwelling with tender persistence on a certain made-dish which would have fitted into that dinner to a T; and he was wondering if he could remember enough about its composition to impart the secret to his mother's cook.

CHAPTER XI.

HALF-MOURNING.

BETTY did not find it difficult to get accustomed to the new happiness of Axel's society. It was well that she considered it a happiness, since the young gentleman gave her so much of it. As he said with beautiful frankness, there was nowhere else in town for a fellow to go — which was not literally true, but meant that there was little congeniality for him in most of the neighboring houses. Not that he began to get bored at home; on the contrary he was enjoying it immensely, for he dearly loved his ease, and here at least all things were subject unto him.

He divided his time quite impartially between the two houses. If Betty went down to the village on errands, she was apt to be met on re-entering by a gust of the peculiar fragrance which Axel was fond of using, blended with the fumes of a very extravagant cigar. Following the scent she was sure of coming upon the young man either stretched in her father's reading-chair exploring a new volume, or prone upon a lounge in the music-room, putting the parrot through its exercises.

"Oh, here is our distinguished foreigner!" said

she in agreeable surprise, on the first occasion of finding him installed there.

"Here he is, sure enough; quite à la Don César, you see."

"Who was that, please?" said Betty, dropping off her hat, and sitting down as one whose last wish is fulfilled.

"Oh, an interesting young fellow who had a way of sliding into people's houses while the family were out, and making himself at home. No objection to the smoke, *Jomfru?*"

"Oh no; there is plenty of that here all the time. It is very pleasant to have you running in without ceremony, just as you used."

"Much obliged, *skoenne Fruken!* This lounge is a new acquaintance, is n't it? Awfully enticing one, too," said the young man, with an appreciative twist of his solid frame.

"Why do you call me by dreadful foreign names? Pray don't!" said Betty: "you know I can't understand them. — Have n't you grown up to be very lazy, Axel? It is so fine out-of-doors. I have walked four miles since breakfast."

"Amazing girl! Oh yes, I am very lazy," agreed Axel, with a great ha-ha of amusement. "You are going to encourage me in it, too. You are going to sit down at that piano and perform the most soothing movement you can think of, while I relapse into gentle slumbers" —

"Nothing of the kind!" returned Betty with spirit. "If you are in such an exhausted condition, you will

be better off at the stone cottage. Your mother has early dinner to-day, on the Doctor's account."

"I dine here this afternoon, thanks," observed Axel, shaking up the sofa pillow. "Early dinners are detestable. — Come, are you going to play for me? I have n't heard a sample of your proficiency yet, you know."

"And yet you propose going to sleep over it!" said Betty, reproachfully, although she was drawing near the piano with her usual submission. She was ready to play Axel to sleep if he desired it, exactly as she had been ready to act as sun-screen for his little lordship's eyes, in the birchwood of their childish rambles.

Axel lay and watched her with curiosity as she played. He continued to stare at her when she had ceased and was waiting, a little embarrassed, for his word of comment.

"Thanks," said he, after a short pause, which Betty considered odd; and he gave her a quite angelic smile across the rings of smoke. "Do you say you have studied at home here all the time? not in the city at all?"

"Not at all — not with anybody except mamma."

"And have you heard no great artists play, — no professionals?"

"Only Miss Gerard, some years ago."

"*Only* Miss Gerard! You don't mean the great pianist, Adeline Gerard, who died last year? Where did you hear her, pray?"

"She was here, making us a little visit. She was

a great friend of mamma's, and came all the way from London chiefly to see her. Oh, how she played to us! — I did not care much about my music before that; but since then I have cared about nothing so much. I might have gone to study with her in London, if she had lived. She asked to have me then, but I was too small; and she was already out of health, mamma says. Yes, I am sure mamma would have let me go to London. And then, only think, what a fine performer I might have made!"

"Only think!" echoed Axel, solemnly. "Well, go on, if you please."

"Ah, you should hear Christina play," said Betty, her slim fingers coaxing little twirls of melody from the keys. "She can do wonderful things with her hands."

"I dare say. But in default of Christina, one must put up with her little sister for a while. Come, an adagio now, *Fruken!* pray you, let me dream again."

Betty considered a moment, and then with a roguish face began the "Farewell" sonata dedicated by the master to his great pupil, Archduke Rudolph. Her face lost its roguish look long before the "farewell" was over; she was following out a bit of her own story in the notes as they crept sighingly through the "absence," and ran with a joyous crash into the "return." There was a pink spot on each cheek as her little hands sprung like steel upon the final chords.

Axel had not gone to sleep as yet. On the contrary, he rose upon his elbow and applauded quite forcibly.

"Good, Betty!" said he, lying back with that appreciative smile of his. "A favorite of mine. By the way, what picture does it remind you of, let me ask?"

"That German picture — I don't know its name" — answered Betty, promptly, "of the boy starting away from home, with his mother and father watching in the doorway, and the little girl left behind by the flight of steps, to spin. Aunt Bertha has the photograph of it in her sitting-room. And the other one, too, where the boy comes home, grown very tall, and surprises his family" ——

— "And gets surprised himself when he sees how persistently the little spinning-girl has been growing up all that time," Axel added, with a mischievous look at the reedy young figure standing up straight and fair by her piano. "Good again! I 'll get you copies of the pictures at Christmas, if I don't forget it, for being so clever!"

"Will you really, Axel? How very, very nice of you!" cried delighted Betty.

"If I don't forget it," repeated the young man, thinking that very likely he might.

But the promise of the pictures was not nearly so important to Betty as the hint that he considered her clever, and that he seemed to approve her playing. Enrapturing as that was, her sensitive conscience began to take alarm lest she had kept too quiet about Christina's talent; and she fell to praising her sister's performances in the most glowing manner.

"Yes, I am anxious to hear her," said Axel, with-

out revealing any immoderate ardor for the event. "When do you say she will return from the city?"

"Next week, she promised mamma."

When Christina did come, it was full two weeks later than she had promised; but that was her fashion. "One must not cheapen one's self by always arriving on the tick of the clock," was a saying of hers.

She came home in good spirits, seeming quite brightened and improved by the short absence, and evidently pleased at the family demonstrations over her return. They all made much of her, and were glad to see her looking so well and spirited. She brought with her an extra trunk of new raiment — "half-mourning," or, as one might say, three-eighths-mourning garments. Betty remarked a piece of silk of ravishing lilac hue interred in the heart of this trunk; also a box of French violets for house-wear tumbled suggestively into her exploring hands.

"Those are for by-and-by," said Christina, uncurling herself on her morning pillow and looking out like a bright-headed flower. "Are n't they nice? It is a *lit*-tle too soon for them yet; but one can wear white gowns, and I have no end of black ribbons and jet things in that tray."

"I am glad you are so well and cheerful again, Christina," said Betty, tucking back the violets. "You will be in good case to play for us, I see. I am eager to hear you again, and so is Axel. I have told him so much about your playing."

"Axel? Oh yes, surely. He is at home now, I

remember you said," observed Christina, who had been thinking about nothing else for a day or two.

Her recollections of the boy she knew half-a-dozen or more years before were quite interesting; and she judged that by this time he would have grown into a clever if ingenuous young man, who would have been polished off by his foreign life in a way to make up for his immature age. She promised herself the pleasure of reducing the immature young man to a state of servile admiration, which would put a dash of spice into her rather flavorless sojourn at home. "At that age they always fancy some one older than themselves," was her private reflection.

But Betty was not to share these hopeful meditations. Nor was there any danger of her guessing her sister's whimsical thoughts, she was so unworldly and so childlike yet. She only thought it a little odd that Christina should "fuss" so particularly over her afternoon toilet, and take such a time in deciding on it; especially when the choice lay simply between one white gown and another white gown.

"Why need you mind for to-night, Christina? there 's only Axel to be here," said Betty, "unless that tiresome Jack Leavitt chooses to come."

"I dress for my own satisfaction, always," returned Christina, in a slightly frosty tone. "It is so vexatious to have things obstinate about going on," she added, twitching at a stubborn sash-end. "Do, Betty, bunch up my hair in the neck, and tie a ribbon on it, please. I have never got it quite to suit me since I sent away my Lisette, in Paris."

"You never could get it to look anything but pretty, I know," said Betty, whose warm appreciation of her sister's beauty always remained just as sincere as in the first days of their meeting, when Christina came home a grown young lady.

No, it was quite impossible that Axel should not admire her, Betty thought, and was pleased to think, as he came up to them in the afternoon dusk of their parlor.

Christina had changed somewhat, but only for the prettier, since his last sight of her. Her complexion was what poor Hector used to call, in his flowery tongue, "mother-of-pearl, with rosy reflections." There was a great deal of soft blue shadow around her eyes, which she made the most of by clever treatment of her rich and crispy curling hair. Thanks to Aunt Bertha, Christina had a fine discrimination in dress; and also, thanks to nobody but herself, she had a perfectly easy and charming girlish air in whatever garments she was pleased to put on.

All these things Axel was aware of before he had exchanged two sentences with Mrs. Lecomte. He recognized her for a genuinely pretty woman. He had, however, seen a great many pretty women in the last five years.

As for Christina, her first sensation was one, actually, of embarrassment. Instead of the "immature young man" she had looked for, here she was shaking hands with a dignified figure, whose grave moustached face was familiar and yet unfamiliar, and

fronted her with the gracious neutrality of a wax-works young man. Axel had chosen to renew the acquaintance with what Betty called his grand air, perhaps remembering his little disadvantage in point of years. And when he put on his grand air, he looked very grand indeed — for a young fellow.

Face to face with him, Christina forgot about that. It even seemed to her, as she sat looking up at the young man's generous size, and listening to the dexterous nothings which he felt it proper to say, as if he must have had ten or twelve years the better of her in worldly experience.

There was something novel, too, in his manner. She was used to seeing masculine faces approach her with smiles of imbecile delight and anxious homage; or, in more advanced stages, with a very flattering powder-magazine sort of expression. Consequently she was piqued by the cool, unmoved air with which young Brand talked and laughed, as though she had been any other woman, and a plain one at that.

"What an iron-clad!" she murmured to herself.

When she played for them, later in the evening, she was uneasily aware of his silent criticism. More provoking still, she could see, under the convenient shadow of her hair, that he was turning his non-committal eye from her to Betty beside her, as though instituting private comparisons between them. Exasperating young man! Christina would not have contradicted any one who praised her sister's face, but she was far from viewing it as a rival to her own.

What Axel thought about it did not appear. He was not in the habit of betraying his thoughts.

And meanwhile pretty wide-eyed Betty was watching too, her only concern being that Axel should admire Christina and appreciate her nimble performance. The young lady did "execute" with a great deal of brilliancy, although there was a lack of something — *soul*, a musician would probably say — always evident to those who listened.

"Your Axel has plenty of assurance, at least," said she, when Betty and herself were alone again. She was not entirely sure of having made a great impression on him, which was rather trying.

"Oh, do you think so?" said Betty, beginning to laugh. "Well, I think myself he does n't need any more. You like him, don't you, Christina?" with the air of putting a quite unnecessary question.

"Why, you give me short notice to decide about that. I should want a rather longer acquaintance with him before committing myself — say another half-hour, at least."

"Oh, you will have enough opportunities for making up your mind. Don't be ironical, please. I am sure you can't help liking him."

Axel would very probably have agreed with her on that point, as he had never had any reason to doubt his own success with people. He was not giving it consideration just then. He said at home that Mrs. Lecomte was remarkably pretty, and that she seemed to bear her loss with great fortitude. Of course it was not natural that such a young and

pretty thing should remain under a cloud any longer than the proprieties absolutely commanded.

Her arrival did not cause any change in his social habits. At first, feelings of delicacy made him shy of recalling in any way the little period of her engagement, when she had made her visit to Lyme in such high feather. But after a while her own frequent allusions to that time showed that she was not so sensitive about it.

Axel remembered the boyish nickname of "Countess" that he had given her then; and would not for the world have let it slip off his tongue under the present circumstances. He was considerably astonished, in truth a little shocked, when she reminded him of it one day, in an airy manner.

"Oh, very well," said he to himself. "I need n't be so careful of your feelings, Countess!"

And one afternoon the nickname escaped him, as he and the two sisters were driving over the country-road in a somewhat effervescent frame of mind.

Christina laughed, and showed plainly that she rather liked it than otherwise. After that she was "Countess" again, quite commonly.

CHAPTER XII.

AXEL MEETS A NEW SPECIMEN.

"WE must show him all our lions, mamma," said Betty as soon as Axel was well installed at the cottage.

But little time was consumed in that ceremony; and the "lions" proved so very tame that Axel showed only an increased fondness for the stone ones next door. The Harrods, Jack Leavitt, even Mr. Goodwillie, had been produced for Axel's entertainment, with such other eligible people as the little township afforded.

"And now I believe we have come to the end of our lions, Axel," said Dr. Brand, crossing his slippered feet with great enjoyment on the doorstep. The father and son were smoking together in good fellowship at the head of their cottage-steps. Morning-glories, in those days not yet convicted of "bad form," ran up the door-posts and made a pretty framework for the opposite bit of pastoral scenery. "Yes, I really believe we have come to the end of our lions."

"For which, and all other mercies," irreverently murmured the young man, "I assure you I 'm truly thankful, sir!"

"That is," continued the Doctor, "with the exception of the Reverend Roderic Musgrove, who has been away in the city for a few days, or you would have met him before this."

"Spare me, papa!" exclaimed Axel, raising his irreverent eyebrows. "Who the dickens is the Reverend Roderic Musgrove?"

"Why, my *dear* boy!" protested his mild-eyed mamma, catching the remark through the adjoining window of her sewing-room. "Mr. Musgrove is the rector, and a most agreeable young man — quite charming, indeed. I really think you will like him."

"It occurred to me to mention him just now, because" — resumed the Doctor with an air of observation — "because I see him in the distance."

The Reverend Roderic, indeed, might now be seen as well as heard, making his way lightly across the fields with his favorite fishing-tackle, and whistling at the full power of his sound English lungs. He was accompanied by a nice little terrier, which frisked and wiggled in tireless delight, and uttered an explosion of yaps when his reverend master vaulted over a fence in the best Oxford style.

"Oh, that can't be your rector," said Axel, bringing out the eye-glass which he carried around with him as a kind of University badge. "That is a young fellow with a dog and a fishing-rod. Look at that jump! What sort of a rector should you call that, sir? And do you hear what he 's whistling? an air from Boïeldieu, by Jove!"

All Axel's foreign training had not rubbed out of

him certain childish superstitions about the "sanctity of the clergy," which his mamma had carefully worked into him with his nursery lessons. His life abroad had not acquainted him with any specimens of the modern clergyman. So he said again, bringing his glass to bear on the nimble pedestrian, "That can't be your rector, sir."

"Oh, but it *is* Musgrove," declared the Doctor. "That 's one of his favorite airs; and he jumps like a grasshopper! He is a nice fellow. I think I will speak to him." The Doctor rose, and projected an unceremonious "Hi!" into the distance.

The Reverend Roderic paused and turned his head. He was carrying his cap in hand, and at sight of the Doctor he swung it by way of recognition. Responding to the Doctor's pantomime, he turned about and strode toward the stone cottage.

Axel continued to gaze through his glass without saying anything, while his father ran down the steps and walked out hospitably to the gate. Then he sauntered after him slowly, with a curious air.

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Musgrove," called out the Doctor, as an advance-guard of breathless terrier whisked under the gate and sniffed noisily at his feet. "Ha, Jacky! good dog! — Your absence has made itself felt, sir. Must have been tolerably warm in the city this week, I judge."

"Ah, distressingly so!" said the rector, shaking hands with immense vigor. "Quite pulled me down, Doctor, it did indeed."

Axel wondered what the reverend gentleman's

physical state could have been before the "pulling down" process. He spoke in a rich, sonorous voice, well suited to his frame, which was furnished with the muscles of a gymnast. His smooth-shaven face was pale but solid, with a good development of chin and lower lip. Light eyes, keen as points of steel, twinkled under his square forehead; and many little lines around them indicated a strong sense of humor.

"I am happy to show you the balance of my family," said Dr. Brand with an introductory gesture, and a proud smile on his handsome face. "My son, Mr. Musgrove."

"You have my congratulations, Doctor," said Mr. Musgrove, holding out his hand to Axel.

The two young men looked at each other with friendly faces. Axel was rather silent at first, after his usual habit; but paid gracious attention to Mr. Musgrove's remarks. The rector interested him greatly, and seemed to offer a novel psychological example. He was fond of studying people. Odd as it might be, among all those he had met abroad he had not encountered one belonging to that "advanced" apostolic type which the Reverend Roderic illustrated. Perhaps at that time they were only beginning to appear.

He therefore looked at the young divine with a good deal of curiosity, not quite free from amusement. He had that very natural feeling to young worldly people, that however worldly they may be themselves, the man who stands for their spiritual leader ought to be some-

thing quite apart from and above their ways and thoughts — a teacher instead of a schoolmate, as it were. Not that he felt much in need of teacher or leader; but he was very sensitive to the proprieties; and how, alas! could he give the proper amount of reverence to the cloth when fixed on a young fellow not so much older than himself, who tramped the fields with sinister intentions toward pickerel, and roused the echoes with operatic trills?

But Axel's father liked the rector: even his gentle mamma seemed to approve him; which of course forbade his forming a dislike for the Reverend Roderic.

The Reverend Roderic, on his side, took a most uncommon fancy to Axel. That seemed natural, because everybody liked young Brand. Day after day the two met each other, and fell into more familiar intercourse. The rector confided to Axel that he was very particularly glad of his society, and admitted that he *had* found it just a trifle slow in Lyme.

To which Axel returned, with his lazy air of amusement, that he thought it likely; but added that he himself found the slowness quite agreeable, for a change.

The rector spoke with much enthusiasm of the Karlsen family; and the other assented, and noticed, smoothing his moustache gravely, that his clerical friend had very little to say about Mrs. Lecomte.

The rector begged Axel to come and see him often: which Axel was very willing to do, especially after he

had been there once and found a pleasant disorderly "den," smelling of smoke and adorned with fowling-pieces and piscatorial emblems, and a said-to-be Stradivarius topping a pile of music-books.

Mr. Musgrove showed off this last treasure with great satisfaction when the young men sat together in his study. Now and then he brought it over to the Brands' and played it to them; still oftener to the Karlsens', where he also sang readily when asked. Mrs. Brand was very well pleased at Axel's familiarity with the rector; indeed, she was pleased at anything that pleased her son.

Betty was less so. She could not complain that Mr. Musgrove deprived her of Axel's society, for somehow the young man was perpetually lounging about the house, inside or out. But she had no fancy for Mr. Musgrove; and she could not quite understand what attraction Axel found in him. She did not think it could be any spiritual attraction; at any rate, St. Agatha's did not seem to come in for a share of it.

His mamma had great difficulty in coaxing him to adorn the head of the family pew on occasional Sunday mornings: something which the Doctor systematically declined to do at any time. Axel generally begged off with caresses and filial teasings when his mamma argued. If Betty or Christina lectured him he replied by a flighty speech about the altars of Nature; and went off to lie on his back under the apple-trees and watch the butterflies and beetles till he fell asleep, or until the ladies returned from church. They

got into a habit of looking over the hedge for his brown head on their way home. If it appeared to be asleep they tossed burrs at it; and when it roused up in feigned wrath they stopped and exchanged a little badinage with its owner across the bushes.

Betty came home from church one morning earlier than the others. She walked slowly, holding up her white frock from the dust and balancing a big sun-umbrella thoughtfully in her warm hand, from which she had pulled off its little silk covering. At the crook in the road where they usually stopped to look for Axel she stopped, rested on the low stone wall, and looked over the bushes. No one was in Axel's favorite place under the apple-tree. Nothing was there except the beetles, the warm grass weighted with sleepy insects, a few rambling garden-flowers spending their sweetness under the hot sun.

Betty pulled off her other glove and turned into the dark elm-walk winding up to the house. "He must have gone with his mother to St. Agatha's after all," said she.

But when she let herself in at the front door and went across to her music-room, she found its air heavy with the well-known scented smoke, betraying the presence of "Don Cesar."

"Not a soul here to let me in, not a soul!" murmured a drowsy voice deep in the shadows. "Where are the inhabitants of the lower regions, *Jomfru?*"

"The maids always go to church, of course," said Betty, peering into the darkened room. "*How* did you get in, Axel?"

"Parlor-window — porch, you know. Little gymnastic feat, that 's all."

"So you break into houses like a burglar instead of going to church respectably! And all your fine talk about the temple of Nature — Wretched boy! It 's nothing but pure laziness in you. You ought to be disciplined. Your mother is a great deal too indulgent."

"I *was* in the orchard, indeed I was," remonstrated Axel, in a somnolent tone. "Under the apple-tree. I felt very contemplative — very open to impressions. I don't know when I have felt more so: I was quite penetrated with the beauties of Nature. But then a milliped or something of that kind spun right down into my eye. You could n't expect me to pursue my reflections with profit after such an interruption. I left the temple of Nature in possession of the little reptiles, and rambled hither. I was unable to rouse Wilkins, but as I never recognize an obstacle I came in through the window, as described." He closed with a tremendous yawn.

"What desperate perseverance! Why did n't you go home till somebody came to open the house?"

"You are cordial, miss! It was horribly lonesome over there. Papa had gone away, nominally to visit a patient. I think, myself, he went a-fishing."

"What a heathen you are!" said Betty, laughing, and not daring to apply that epithet to her magnificent Doctor. "Do you know, I think they 're going to bring Mr. Musgrove home to dinner."

"Indeed?"

"Do you like Mr. Musgrove very much, Axel?"

"Why, yes; he's a nice sort of fellow," said Axel, suppressing another violent yawn; "plays a fair hand at c — that is — oh yes", (rousing up a little) "I think he preaches a very clever sermon, very clever indeed."

"What were you going to say?" inquired Betty, looking at him with a slightly astonished glance.

"I beg your pardon, I was half-asleep — I was about to say that I liked his sermons very well"—

"How many of them have you heard, Axel?" said Betty, with soft disapproval in her voice. "You let your mother go off alone to services, and you lounge about at home and doze when you might be getting some good out of Mr. Musgrove."

"I think I get more good out of him on week-days," said the reprobate, enjoying himself very much. "What are you brandishing Musgrove at me for? you know *you* don't like him, you little deception."

"Oh, I never said any such thing," disclaimed Betty, in great concern. "Never! *I* say that about a minister! Why, mamma would be shocked beyond words!"

"Well, you need n't say it. It 's plain enough. Oh, you are not so deep, you know! Never mind, I 'm rather glad you don't like him. But as for me, I ought to like him very much, don't you think I ought? for furnishing such good arguments in favor of my go-as-you-please style of life."

"What *do* you mean?" said Betty, rounding her

gray eyes. "When did he ever favor your staying away from church, please?"

"I was not referring to that particular. But does n't he always seem to be having a jolly time? does n't he always take things pretty much as he chooses? Why should n't I, too? Do you ever read anything so old-fashioned as Cowper, Betty? and did you ever happen on a couplet like this?

> 'Strike up the fiddles, let us all be gay!
> Laymen have leave to dance, if parsons play.'"

Betty looked up quickly. "O Axel, do you really think it 's wrong, then?"

"Think *what 's* wrong?" repeated the young man, laughing. "How literal you are! Don't be so limited, Miss Bertha!"

"But you surprise me so. I thought — I thought you were really quite fond of Mr. Musgrove."

"Well, I am fond of him, after a fashion. He amuses me, unspeakably. I like to study him. And I get one solace out of him, at least — whatever my week-day foibles may be, I can't see that old Mus. is any better fellow than I am, out of his pulpit."

"*Old Mus!*" echoed Betty, in a withering tone.

"Beg his pardon — the Reverend Roderic Musgrove. He likes the same things that I do, and spends his time pretty much in the same way, except for his frightful tramps up country, which is a pastime that does n't tempt me at all. And as for his sermons — look here, Betty," — Axel came up on his elbow, quite in earnest — "now, frankly! You

think they 're very clever; so do I. But you know they don't suit you. Very well; they don't suit me. Why must I go and be preached at by a man whom I can't possibly regard as any more spiritually-minded than myself? I never lose that impression of him, even in his pulpit. It 's the result of his theory, I suppose — 'accepting the bond of common humanity,' and so forth. But I don't want a *common* human to give me Scripture lessons! If I am to learn of anybody, it must be a man whose life illustrates something higher than mine. All the same, I give Musgrove credit for not assuming perfections that he does n't possess. If he were hypocritical I could n't tolerate him. But don't ask me to sit at his feet as if he were old St. Francis, for I shan't do it."

Betty listened in no slight bewilderment. It was the first approach to so serious a theme that she had ever heard from Axel.

"I did n't suppose," said she, gravely, "that you ever thought about such things. I wished that you would go to St. Agatha's because I thought it was so much better for you than lounging at home. And I thought you liked Mr. Musgrove; and he is so clever, I fancied you would find his sermons interesting"—

"Interesting? Oh, I dare say. I can run down to the city and listen to an interesting discourse almost any day, in the lecture season. It surprises you to hear me hold forth on this subject. I 'll go a little further. I have no patience with a clergyman

who stands up in his consecrated place, among the symbols of the Supreme, and twists his language into little tropes and mixes it with little jokes, to take 'the ears of the groundlings.' I 'll go further yet — I have simply contempt for him! Now, Musgrove is n't quite so bad as that, you know. But he 's bitten with it. He 's too apt to let his fine rhetoric overrun the solid part of his sermons, just as a vine runs all over a chapel — till you nearly lose sight of the building."

"But the chapel is there all the same, is n't it? I suppose he thinks it is more attractive to people by reason of the vine," said Betty, putting in a good word for the accused.

"Oh, I dare say. And he has no scruples about getting in a witty thing either, when he sees his chance. Witticisms in the pulpit! Fancy the high priests in the Tabernacle cracking jokes before the altar! He does it, as you say, to make his discourse 'attractive to the people.' On the same principle that you shake a rattle at a baby, as a last resort, to keep it quiet a few minutes. No, I 'll have no rattles shaken at me!"

He threw himself back and laughed.

Like all reticent people he was a little ashamed of having spoken out his thoughts so vigorously; and he put on a quizzical air, as though it might all pass for a joke. But Betty saw that he was in earnest, and wondered at this unexpected glimpse.

The sound of voices entered at the window; evidently Christina was bringing the rector home to

dine, as they expected. A little conscience-stricken after the criticism to which she had been a party, Betty ran out to open the door hospitably.

Christina floated in, shaking the dust from her black gauzes. The Reverend Roderic followed, carrying her sunshade and an armful of lace which she had discarded on account of the heat.

"How delightfully dark and cool it is here after the glare outside, Miss Betty. — That you, Brand? We failed to see you at church this morning. I fear your continued absence implies something uncomplimentary to my sermons."

"Not so, Musgrove," returned the young man, who was intimate enough by this time with the rector to take his own way of addressing him. "Quite otherwise. 'Tis only that my health requires indulgence, above all upon the seventh day. You would hardly suspect me of being afflicted with ill-health, now!"

"Moral ill-health, my boy, moral ill-health! Oh, don't hope to escape sermonizing by staying away from church! I shall frame a special denunciation and hurl it at you unaware, on a week-day."

"Take him in hand, Mr. Musgrove," said Christina lightly, gathering herself up to go and make her afternoon toilet. "He *is* a bad subject. He is in need of your best efforts, I assure you."

Betty opened the window-blinds; and the soft leaf-tempered light flowed into the room.

Axel pulled himself up, gave a final, somewhat regretful yawn, stroked down his rumpled crest, and

assumed a more social aspect. The Reverend Roderic, who always found it immensely hard to keep still, made short turns about the room as he talked and laughed. Betty watched him, and thought of the machine-like restlessness of some animals she had seen in a cage, in the city — furry illustrations of perpetual motion. But she did not intend to compare those striped and mottled activities with the rector of St. Agatha's. He was simply a strong young man, blessed with such a rush of vitality that it was impossible for him to restrain his exuberant gestures, his free play of elbows and shoulders, his leonine trick of shaking back his thick crop of hair.

She retired into a seat beside her piano, leaning on it affectionately, and contrasted the rector's animated bulk with Axel's idle, graceful figure, which at that moment was "lopping forward" in a boneless sort of way upon its elbows.

"I always thought Axel would have more energy when he was grown," she reflected. "I suppose he is resting now after his travels." Then she fell to thinking over his recent unexpected remarks, and wishing that Mr. Musgrove were a little different kind of clergyman, and could have a stronger influence over him.

The clerical voice struck in on her revery. Mr. Musgrove had picked up a book from the table, and was whipping over its leaves with his finger and putting on an expression of grave disapproval.

"Who has been reading this?" he asked.

"I have," said Betty, absently. It was one of the

French novels that Christina had brought home with her from abroad, a highly spiced though inoffensive production, offering every known climax, beginning with a decapitation and ending in a quicksand. Betty's course of reading had not included much of that class; and as the story contained nothing worse than thrilling she thought it very interesting.

Mr. Musgrove laid down the book with an air of disgust.

"What 's the matter with it?" asked Axel.

"I wonder Miss Betty can fancy a work of this nature," said Mr. Musgrove, solemnly. "It 's not the sort of book I should recommend, at all."

"I did not notice anything very bad in it," said Betty; "only startling things — nothing really bad."

"Not intrinsically bad, perhaps," said the Reverend Roderic, "and yet bad in its effects. The sensational is always bad. It is a diet of literary curry and red peppers, you know. A story like this, crammed with absurd horrors, and without decided merit enough to repay the reading of it, cannot be called a healthy article of diet for anybody's mind, you know."

"I don't see how you can have found out about the story so quickly," said Betty with meekness, feeling that the Reverend Roderic was more than half right in his judgment.

Axel smiled and pulled down the corners of his moustache.

"The author is well known in his country as a writer of sensational fiction," said Mr. Musgrove, so-

berly; "he never writes anything else. That class of works undoubtedly does much harm and precious little good. It 's a pity fertile wits should spend themselves so. — By the way, Brand, have you come across that clever thing in the new '*Eclectic?*'" — etc.

The theme was changed. Betty thought it very proper in Mr. Musgrove to condemn the bad qualities of a book; and accordingly he mounted somewhat in her esteem. Axel was rather astonished, but it soon slipped out of his mind, till recalled by a little circumstance some days later.

He was passing an afternoon in Mr. Musgrove's study, engaged in his favorite amusement of rummaging the rector's book-shelves, perched on that gentleman's little step-ladder. The rector, stretched on the deep window-seat in a species of shooting-jacket, was hugging his violin and softly rasping its strings. He looked at the moment more like a member of a strolling Orphic society taking a holiday than like the stately pastor of St. Agatha's.

His musings were suddenly disturbed by an explosive chuckle from the step-ladder. Axel had been overhauling a dusty layer of books on the topmost shelf, and had fallen upon something that appeared to amuse him very much.

"What ails you, Brand?" inquired Mr. Musgrove, with suspended bow. "What have you found up there?"

"Literary curry and red peppers, my boy!" Axel exclaimed, beginning to imitate his friend's "dis-

coursing voice." "This is not at all the sort of book that I should recommend, Roderic! It cannot be called a healthy article of diet for anybody's" —

"Oh — Well, sure enough," said the Reverend Roderic, laughing rather consciously, "there it is! I'd forgotten about it, but I know it used to be tumbling round among my books at home. Don't 'tell on me,' as the boys say!"

"I have a great mind to tell Betty, in revenge for the lecture she had to take on account of this little lucubration. The book was n't hers, anyway; it belonged to Mrs. Lecomte."

"Ah well, it would n't do *me* any harm to read it, of course. A clergyman is obliged to open his eyes once in a while upon the things he censures, in order to know what he 's talking about," said the rector, with the air of introducing a novelty in argument. "I think *you* must appreciate that, Brand. And in my position, you know, I could n't have spoken otherwise than as I did."

"Oh, of course," said Axel, with a shrug; and the little object of discussion whirled back into the dust whence it came, and the society of various similar works.

His opinion of the Reverend Roderic was not much affected by the incident. He had already, as he said to himself, "located him," and was not to be perplexed by any new phases of the Musgrovian character. Only a few weeks before this, in helping to hunt for some trifle through the chaos of the rector's writing-desk, Axel came across a pack of cards, considerably limp around the edges.

"Whew!" said he, pouncing upon and shuffling them with a malicious smile. "My reverend friend" —

"Caught!" said the rector, promptly accepting the situation. "That does look a little off color, to be sure, for a Lyme clergyman! They are relics of old Oxford days, before I went in for the D. D., and I did n't like to throw them away. I 'll tell you what it is, Brand, my father was a Dean, and he always played and took his port like any other old-school churchman, and it was considered all right. I know your people over here have different views about it, for the clergy. But most of them think it 's well enough for themselves — *my* parishioners do, and I agree with them — and if it is a harmless amusement in itself, where 's the harm in my enjoying it, too? Still, I don't wish to disturb the fossils. But if you like, we might have a little quiet game of cribbage here, with closed doors, you know."

Axel laughed, and began to deal on the lid of the writing-desk.

It was not the last game he had in the clerical study. He did not mention it to anybody except his father, who thereafter made a third party at these innocent orgies, and brought over many bottles of port, with which they rejoiced and made merry out of respect to Mr. Musgrove's deceased parent, the Dean.

CHAPTER XIII.

SWEET CHARITY.

HARMLESS as these little diversions may have been, they would have caused a stir if betrayed to the friends of the three revellers.

Christina would have been very curious and amused — would have persisted in calling it a secret society, and wishing she could be made an honorary member. Betty would have worried over it; not so much about the cribbage and the port, both of which were sometimes enjoyed by her father, as about the Reverend Roderic and his leanings to these worldly pleasures. She did not fail, in her critical moods, to compare him with Mr. Goodwillie, who held a fixed place in her admiration.

And Mr. Goodwillie, certainly, would have looked with no less dubious surprise upon the peculiar tastes of his fellow-servant in the ministry. He had no time to think of amusements for himself. Small as his field of labor might be, there was always something to do for somebody, some writing to be prepared, some plan to be worked out in the interests of his little church. No amusement could be so attractive to him as the halting but earnest talk of some rustic old disciple, or the grateful look on some worn face

in return for a service, or the shy advances of some friendly little child.

Children were always fond of him. He was fond of them, and deft at managing them; even the very little ones were quite at home in his hands, though he was, as the devoted Mrs. Ricker said, a "bachelder."

Enoch Goodwillie was not a very young man any longer, neither was he yet a middle-aged man. He looked much older than he really was. In spite of the old device of fiction which dooms simple young ministers to be the prey of the first coquette who happens along, Mr. Goodwillie had gotten safely into his thirty-ninth year without ever thinking of such a thing. It was doubtful if he had ever glanced at the possibility of being anything but a "bachelder." He went on his pastoral way, his head full of busy benevolence, giving the same warm, impersonal sympathy to each one of his people. Humanity was all inviting to him, he said. But probably no frivolous specimen of it, never so fair and coaxing, could have succeeded in making a plaything of him, he was so guarded by his own pure unworldliness.

If he did ever find himself drawn rather oftener to one house than another in his parish, it was probably the Karlsens' house. The kindness which always met him there was very comfortable; Mrs. Karlsen was one of his best friends, and Betty was much like her mother. He could not help being pleased by the interest which the young girl showed in his work, and not the less because it looked out of a "tea-rose

face" and a pair of soft and kind gray eyes. In fact, as Mr. Goodwillie, on his thirty-ninth birthday, walked away from the stone lions toward his home in the village, he woke to the fact that he was persistently shadowed by the same tea-rose face and gray eyes.

He was puzzled and rather startled, and tried to focus his mind on Joe Ricker's compound fracture and the consequent expenses to be met. But it was a vain attempt. When he reached his own doorstep the shadowy Betty was there before him, smiling with sweet pertinacity.

He stood still outside, and thoughtfully pushed back his hat.

"Well," said he, after a short but profound consideration, "maybe I am something like other people, after all." As he went by the small looking-glass in his room — "Who would have thought it of me?" said he, with a slightly ironical glance at his plain reflection.

And that was the last comment Mr. Goodwillie ever made on his discovery. Any practical following-up of it was as remote from him as if the Karlsens had been living at the antipodes. A suggestion that the lists might be open to all would have held no meaning for him. He was in his sphere now — a poor and busy apostle with somewhat seedy garments — with plenty of work and but a small income, which he ought not to expect to share with any one. He had quietly set aside more than one wish in his life; and if here was a new one to be added to the list, he was going to deal with it as he had with the others — in serene silence.

The idea that a pretty maid of seventeen could let her fancy settle upon him would have struck him as quite too preposterous for notice. Besides, in the light of his own discovery he began to think of Axel, and to "draw horoscopes" of his future which involved the tea-rose face of his old playmate. To say that those reflections were comfortable to Mr. Goodwillie would be to make him out superhuman. But it was only part of his experience, and nobody was to know it. His various charges would be, if possible, better attended to than usual; and there were plenty of them on his hands at the time.

To begin with, it seemed as if the poor people of Lyme had formed a combination to all fall ill at once, which called for peculiarly active benevolence on the part of their minister. And when, following close on the last new case of scarlet fever, a rumor reached him that Lemmy Robbins was "broke out with sumthin 'ruther," Mr. Goodwillie began to feel that things were getting into a bad state indeed.

Lemmy Robbins was the youngest of a little orphaned family who were looked after by a fifteen-year-old sister, stronger in spirit than in body, as Mr. Goodwillie well knew.

"Why, poor Jenny will break down entirely if the boy is to need much care," said the good man, anxiously. And off he hurried to the Robbins cottage to see for himself. The doctor was there talking with Jenny, who brightened instantly at the sight of Mr. Goodwillie's face.

"Doctor Wyse says Lemmy is n't very bad, sir," she exclaimed cheerfully.

"No, it 's nothing but a slight form of scarlatina; very slight and not at all dangerous," said Dr. Wyse. "Only the child must be well looked after, you know — must n't get cold, and must n't miss his medicine. It 's going to keep this little woman pretty busy, with her three other boys and all her work besides. I don't quite see how she 'll get through with it."

"I shall get through somehow, doctor," said Jenny, looking up with her great hopeful eyes.

"Yes, and come down with nervous prostration afterwards," said Mr. Goodwillie to himself, pulling his whiskers. "You must have two or three hours' rest every day, Jenny, or the doctor will have you on his hands too. Some one must be found, to help a little."

Who some one might be the minister could not imagine. His little force of helpers had no time left to give. He himself could play the nurse, but there was many another claim upon him more urgent than that at the Robbins cottage. But poor Jenny's thin, courageous little face gave him no peace. At this point his mind naturally flew back to the stone lions, to the shady interior in some quarter of which Mrs. Karlsen's active figure was probably moving about.

"I have been to her so often lately that it 's really too bad to go again now. They have done so much for me," he meditated. "But there is Mrs. Lecomte, now — why, to be sure, if she were willing to go and look in on little Jenny once in a while" —

He had not seen very much of his friend's wid-

owed daughter, as she was generally out of the way during his visits. He thought that she must be greatly afflicted; and he felt much pity for her, and respectful wonder at her beauty. But, according to Mr. Goodwillie's notion, sorrow is a softener of hearts and an awakener of human kindness; why might not an exercise of charity really prove consoling and beneficial to the bereaved young lady?

He knew that she went out to drive, sometimes to walk, and that her health was not impaired. And he made up his mind to go and describe little Jenny's case to her, feeling in his kind simple heart that no woman would wait after that to be asked for a proof of her compassion.

The Karlsen parlors looked inviting as he glanced into them after his long, dusty afternoon walk. He thought, resisting a shy impulse to go away, that there must be a great deal of company there; his errand suddenly seemed incongruous, and he felt almost as if it were already repulsed. But there were only two callers—it might be said only one, for Axel seemed part of the household. Mr. Musgrove sat near a window, looking extremely comfortable and animated. His little terrier, admitted on probation, lay absorbed in watching Christina, who daintily occupied a basket-chair by her rector. Her fleecy white flounces completely overflowed its wicker-work arms; Mr. Goodwillie thought it looked like a cradle with a pretty infant in it. Her rich hair was tied low in a cluster, as usual; her exquisite white neck was clasped with a black ribbon. The

waxy hand twinkled with great diamonds as it softly swayed her inconsolably-black fan.

The poor minister's spirits fell, he did not know why.

Betty was at her piano in the shadow, touching it so lightly that its response was half-audible. Axel, absolved from ceremony, read a newspaper behind the instrument. They smiled at Mr. Goodwillie as he came in, and waved their hands to him hospitably; and Mrs. Lecomte rose — in a Paphian manner, from the waves of muslin — and gave him her velvet fingers very pleasantly. He looked, with some diffidence, into her lovely blue eyes, and was slightly reassured.

"She is her mother's daughter," he reminded himself.

"You are an inveterate pedestrian, Mr. Goodwillie," said the Reverend Roderic, placing a chair for him with great courtesy. "I've seen you twice already to-day passing my window; and that's a good mile-and-a-half from your place, I should say. Pedestrianism is a fine thing, especially for us who use our brains so much."

"I have had occasion to try my paces lately," said Mr. Goodwillie, smiling, though not quite at ease. He was never quite at ease with this brother-minister; which was singular, for the latter seemed ease itself. "There is a great deal of sickness among my poorer parishioners just now. I am obliged to do more visiting than common on that account."

"Ah, yes. Yes, I understood there was a sort of

epidemic of illness in your parish. It 's very extraordinary, is n't it? Still, I hope the worst is over. How are your invalids getting on, Mr. Goodwillie?"

"Why, I am sorry to say they are *not* all getting on as well as could be desired, sir. And this morning I found still another case, in a family for whom I am much interested" — and Mr. Goodwillie, having broken his ice, plunged into the story at once, growing quite eloquent over poor little Jenny and her struggles.

Christina leaned forward to listen, and kept her violet eyes fixed on his face with a look of delicate sympathy. He felt encouraged as he watched her.

"Poor little thing!" she exclaimed, when he had finished, settling back with a deep sigh into the muslin waves. "What a dreadfully hard time she has had! I 'm sure I *hope* she will be able to carry it through without injuring her health, though I don't see how she possibly can!"

"She has determination enough for it," said Mr. Goodwillie, whose face had fallen a little, "if only she were not so slight and small. But what she needs is occasional rest; and if I could find some one who would consent to step in and supply her place in the little brother's sick-room once in a while" —

"Yes, of course, Mr. Goodwillie, that is just what she ought to have! Now, I should think there would be plenty of people who would readily do that for her. Is n't there some one you can think of who could be had for the purpose?" said Christina, her

eyes full of innocent solicitude. Evidently the baby in the cradle could not have held itself more irresponsible in the matter.

"To tell the truth, Mrs. Lecomte," said the minister, a little roused, "that was my chief motive in calling here this afternoon, although I and my work have already received so much kind assistance from the family that I am half afraid of being an imposition."

"Really?" said Christina, leaning back with a look of bright astonishment. "You were thinking of our Maria, I suppose. I know Maria is a good nurse, but I don't see how mamma could possibly spare her; and then there is the danger of infection — and Hulda is so clumsy that really she would not be of the slightest use" ——

"But I was not thinking of either Hulda or Maria," said the minister, driven to his point. "I hoped — you will excuse me for hoping, Mrs. Lecomte — that perhaps it would not be an unwelcome suggestion — that you yourself might find a certain gratification in giving the comfort of your presence to the poor girl now and then. It is little more than the presence that is needed. You need have no fear of infection. It is a simple child's disease, and it is especially for the girl's sake that I suggest it."

He did not add, as he thought of doing, that the charity might bring its reward by diverting her mind from her own trouble. The atmosphere in which he found himself was not an atmosphere of trouble, exactly — or at least it was not the sort of trouble he had been used to seeing.

If he had invited Mrs. Lecomte to visit a small-pox hospital the request could hardly have made a greater sensation. Mr. Musgrove's face became blank with amazement. Christina's did the same for an instant, and then two little jets of red sprang up in her cheeks, and grew deeper and deeper. The look she fixed on poor Mr. Goodwillie was a singular compound of fear, pique, and disgust.

"I!" she exclaimed, sitting up in her chair. "You actually want *me* to go and be a nurse! a person of my constitution and in my trying circumstances. Oh, I don't see how you could have thought of such a thing! It shows how *very* little you understood me."

Mr. Goodwillie already felt assured of that.

"Yes, really, my dear sir," said Mr. Musgrove in a tone of expostulation, "a glance at Mrs. Lecomte shows that she is not adapted to work of that nature. You want a muscular person, you know, for that kind of thing. Mrs. Lecomte is — a — not muscular."

"And a disease like that, too — a contagious disease" — persisted the young widow, lamentably; "to come to *me* about it of all persons in the world! — it is really too inconsiderate."

She covered her flushed face with her handkerchief, as if overcome by recollections, and hurriedly withdrew from the room.

"The late Mr. Lecomte, you may remember, was the victim of a contagious disease," observed Mr. Musgrove reproachfully.

Mr. Goodwillie sat for a moment as under a weight of guilt; he was sure he had not said anything offen-

sive, yet Mrs. Lecomte's agitated exit put him in a very unpleasant mental attitude. Then he recovered himself, and looked at Mr. Musgrove with a trifle of color playing over his thin cheeks.

"I said distinctly it was *not* a contagious disease," he remarked simply.

"Oh, I know; but, my dear sir, you don't take into consideration the nerves of a young lady so recently bereaved. You could hardly expect her to follow your explanations."

"Mr. Goodwillie," said Betty's quiet voice. She had been attentive in the background; and on Christina's retreat she had left her piano and come forward. "Why did n't you ask me to go and help at the Robbins'? Did you think I was n't capable of doing it?"

"You are capable of doing anything, Miss Betty. I should have asked you if you had not done so much service for me already that I was ashamed to want more."

"That was a mistake, Mr. Goodwillie. You must always give me a chance to help in your good works; you know I call it a privilege. I will go over there directly and see what I can do for Jenny."

The offer was a more generous one than anybody suspected. Betty had been enjoying one of her happiest hours, so happy that it required some effort to voluntarily break it off. The child never asked for more absolute pleasure than to spend an afternoon as she had been doing, playing to herself, with Axel somewhere in speaking distance. It was about the

same to her whether he read, or dozed, or tossed an occasional remark at her, so long as he was there. But it would take more than Axel or her beloved music to keep Betty from what she considered her duty.

"It is very kind of you, Miss Betty; I feel most grateful. And you are really not too tired? it will not be too much for you to go this afternoon? For she can pull through till to-morrow without help, I am sure."

"Oh, but she shall not. You must not think because I am pale that I am not strong. I am half-English, you know. And, Mr. Goodwillie," added the young girl in a hesitating tone, as the minister took up his hat, "don't mind about my sister, please. She is so sensitive, you know; in some ways she is quite like a child. I am sure you won't think she meant to be unkind."

"Pray don't be concerned, Miss Betty. *I* should make an apology," said the minister, with a grave smile at the girl, whose soft eyes seemed to appeal more than her words for his indulgence to Christina. He admired the loyalty which made her try to shield and excuse her sister's too evident faults. "It was rather thoughtless of me, I see. I ought to have considered before making my abrupt request of Mrs. Lecomte."

Axel had been silently attending to this episode over the top of his newspaper. He now laid the paper aside, and dropped unnoticed through a convenient window into the garden.

As Mr. Goodwillie tramped over the dusty roadside where it passed the Brands' orchard, the young man suddenly jumped the low wall and stepped along beside him.

Mr. Goodwillie stared.

"Why," said he, "I thought I left you just now behind Miss Karlsen's piano."

"You left me getting out of the window, sir, though you did n't notice it. Excuse me, but I want to ask if you are positively certain that there is no danger in Betty's going to that cottage to-day."

"You heard what I said about the boy's sickness, Mr. Brand," said the minister, standing still. "Do you suppose I would permit the young lady to go there at the slightest risk to herself? She is too valuable to be placed under risks. Do you suppose I have so little regard for her as to put her health and life in jeopardy?"

"No, I do *not*, sir," said Axel, with a convinced air. "I hope you 'll excuse me. I certainly had no reason to doubt your prudence. I don't know why I should have run after you to ask you that, I 'm sure," and the young man's brown head vanished as it had come, over the wall, with a courteous salute.

"I do, though," said Mr. Goodwillie, looking after it half-enviously as he trudged on again. "Perhaps you don't; but I do. Happy fellow! and how little you know your happiness!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"MAKING FRIENDS."

PROBABLY Mr. Goodwillie was right, and Axel did not know how happy he was.

At all events, as the summer waned, he began to show signs of restlessness which was not so much perhaps the eruption of repressed energy as a beginning of ennui at the placid country-life he found so pleasant at first. Betty saw it quickly, of course; and one day as she sat in the porch with Axel and Mr. Musgrove, some chance word dropped by the former made an opening, and she taxed him playfully with being tired of them at home, and asked if he was not dying to get away from them again.

"Why no, of course not," said Axel, with a little of his condescending manner, "not tired of you. I've enjoyed the summer very much, you know. Only, the fact is, I think I've been lying by about as long as I ought. A man should n't rest on his oars *too* long. And if any business were to take me over the water for a while, I should n't exactly regret it, you know."

"Ah, there it comes," said Mr. Musgrove. "Yes, you see, Miss Betty, the spell of the Old World is

upon him. It begins to draw; and we shan't be able to keep him with us long."

"Well, I like it — living abroad," said Axel, with the air of a venerable fellow who has passed many decades beyond seas. "Of course, I like it here; but that's no reason why I should stay here all the time, I suppose. One wants a change every little while, does n't one? I have been here a long time now, you see."

"Nearly three months, Axel," said Betty gently, looking down at him with a trace of reproach in her eyes.

"We others don't want a change," said Mr. Musgrove. "Look at me, now. If you had been born and brought up in England, it would n't be so odd if you were pining to get back there. But I 'm contented enough here; why are n't you?"

"Oh, that's different. You 're a clergyman. A clergyman ought to be contented anywhere, eh? Besides, your logic is poor. You liked to go away from home — for a change, I fancy. Why is it odd if I like to do the same thing?"

"I 'm afraid you don't quite feel that this *is* your home, Axel," observed Betty gravely, dissimulating a little sigh. She was thinking of Fredrika Lindholm, whose papa had such a large hospitality, and a face like an Alkmaar cheese. But Axel was not; the fact is, he had half-forgotten that blonde *Jomfru* already, and had not the least notion of claiming Herr Lindholm's hospitality again very soon.

"Oh, my home is anywhere," said Axel, putting

his clasped hands behind his head against the rail. His eyes had a smiling, far-away look that Betty knew very well, and was silently jealous of; for it seemed to be directed at some distant scenes or faces which were all unknown to her. "I am like Councillor Goethe — I am a *World-Child*. I happened to be born here; that is all. Why should the accident of birth give a town, or a state, or a country, the right to handcuff me? I will live where I choose, or I will sail under what flag I choose. *Nihil humanum a*" —

"Oh, don't!" called out the Reverend Roderic, breaking into a hearty laugh. "I had that in a sermon last Sunday, for a novelty. But go on with the declaration of independence, my bold cosmopolite! I see you 'd make a good stump-speaker, as they call it here; you have that at least in common with the Yankees."

"You are not patriotic, Axel," said Betty, disapprovingly.

"Patriotic? Pshaw! I am a Dane, if you come to that. Mamma was born in England. How much am I a Yankee, if you please?"

"*I* am American," said Betty, with dignity, "though my mother is a thorough Englishwoman, and my father as much a Dane as yours. But I shall always be an American, for all that; and I think anybody might be glad of being one."

She was a little troubled whenever Axel talked in that strain. It seemed to put a distance between them; and she felt a sinking of spirits, like a fore-

runner of that which was to follow. It came out in a few days that he really was going to cross the ocean again. Some friends of his father had obtained an unimportant post for him in one of the English cities — "it does n't make much difference what it is," said the young gentleman, "provided it is respectable and leaves me a reasonable amount of liberty. I should like to turn myself around once in a while, you know."

They thought it would admit of that. The young man graciously agreed to accept it.

Betty took the news quite simply. She was expecting something of the sort; and though that did not make it any more agreeable, she was determined that neither Axel nor any one else should see how very much she felt it. If he was so eager to get away from them, she observed to herself, it was better that he should do so. And at the same time, feeling in her secret heart that the boy-Axel was there yet, however changed, she added, for consolation: "There will be a time, by and by, when he will remember his home, and come back to it, and be more glad to come back than he was to go away."

He was to sail in October. The only thing to do was to make the most of him while he remained with them. He did not enjoy being the object of any demonstrations; in fact, a more undemonstrative young fellow would be hard to find. He liked to do as he pleased in his own careless way, and to have all his rather dainty tastes catered to "without any fuss." In the matter of sentiment, never was a

young man seemingly freer from it; though Betty had often heard him rhapsodize over pretty actresses and singers, and was highly interested, in a quite impersonal way. As regarded Christina, he was most unimpressible. The cunning beauty tried all her arts, her subtlest sorceries in black lace and jet, in white and violet — first her childish style, then her grown-up and blasé style, both of which had had their triumphs; but on this hard subject it was all futile and of none effect. Axel was by turns mischievous and moody with her; he would be amusing enough for an hour or so, and then, concealing a yawn, would slip into the smoking-room and become completely absorbed in the society of Mr. Karlsen.

With Betty he was more natural, and always seemed to be enjoying himself in a quiet way. But it was the old fellowship keeping on between them, and containing not a hint of the romance which Dr. Brand was always hoping to see. Betty was well satisfied to have it so; all she wanted was that it might continue. Her sentiment was the simplest kind of sentiment, half-formed and easily contented. For some reason — perhaps because she had escaped much novel-reading — she seldom built castles in Spain for Axel and herself to inhabit. She went so far indeed sometimes as to think how very disagreeable it would be to find him preferring some one before herself; and within the last year she had even been looking at this as a dim possibility. But she had not yet had occasion to find out exactly how disagreeable it might be.

Christina thought of it, too. She was piqued quite unbearably by the utter failure of her fascinations; and still not hopeless that Axel's odd behavior was due to some effect that she had upon him. Any effect was better than no effect. She would rather — much rather see him afraid of her than indifferent to her.

One day, the week before his departure, Axel sauntered across by the "short-cut" to find his neighbor's house apparently deserted. Betty had gone on some of her ministrations, and Mr. Karlsen had taken his wife out to drive. Axel wandered about the empty parlors for a moment or two, and then strolled down to the gate and cast himself on the grass under the hedge. He had not been there many minutes before the rustling of muslin was heard, and a pretty copper-tinted head peeped at him from the other side of a lilac-bush.

"I thought I heard you straying about here somewhere. You wanted to see me, of course," said Christina, in slightly aggressive playfulness. "Or could it have been some one else you were looking for?"

"Oh, not anybody in particular, thank you," said Axel, getting up with a somewhat bad grace, and propping his tall figure against the gate-post. "There did n't seem to be anybody to see. I supposed you had gone to drive with your mother and father."

"How relieved you must have been! and how disappointed you must be now!" remarked the young lady, in a tone that was partly jesting and partly

defiant. She stepped to the other gate-post, and rested her round lace-frilled elbow on it.

Axel made no reply to the pleasantry beyond the silent protest of a shrug.

"*That's* Frenchy, at any rate," said Christina, burlesquing it. "I wish you were as French in other respects."

"Such as what, pray?" inquired Axel, languidly examining his cuff-stud.

"Politeness," returned Christina, shortly. "Graciousness."

Axel threw a provoked glance at her. "So! I am impolite! And ungracious, am I?"

"Extremely so," said she, watching him gravely under her dark lashes. "Don't you call it ungracious to keep persistently out of a lady's society, and very often to dodge away from her just when she is doing her best to amuse you? And impolite to let everybody see that you dislike and are bored by her? I 've known you to yawn as much as a dozen times while I have been trying to entertain you."

"I beg your pardon, I am sure," said Axel, looking at her with rather an ugly expression, and twisting the cuff-stud in a determined manner.

"Don't do that! you 'll certainly snap it off," observed his companion, laughing vexatiously.

He released the stud, and put his hands behind him between the gate-bars. "You 're not fair, Mrs. Lecomte."

"Well, *that's* flattering, too!" said she, putting on a crestfallen air and giving him such a look of comic

reproach that he smiled a little, in an exasperated way.

"I mean, you 're very hard upon me," he explained, turning around and staring over the gate.

"Oh no, you 're very hard upon *me*," Christina said, copying his movement. "You should n't keep up your early antipathies in this way; I call it really unjust."

"Antipathies? May I beg to know what you mean now?"

"Don't dissimulate, if you please! I know very well why you always detested me when I was a small child, and why you have never left off detesting me to this day."

"Why, then? — if you will have it so."

"Because I worried your jackdaw and threw things at the pigeons and chip-birds."

Axel straightened up and broke into a roar of laughter.

"But that is n't a sensible reason," continued Christina, with an air of appeal, "for detesting me now, is it?"

"The child is mother of the woman," said Axel, looking around and smiling at her in a more good-humored manner.

"Why," said she, "I 'm sure I 'm as amiable as never was with that horrid parrot Betty is so fond of, though it does address the most unpleasant remarks to me. And I *never* stone the pigeon-house!"

"Admirable self-repression!" murmured the young man.

"But I see what you mean," she went on, in a soft and hesitating tone. "You think the same instinct is there yet; and that a child who finds amusement in teasing such small game is likely to find it with other kinds of game in later years. You think, perhaps, that discretion is — what is that worn-out old saying about discretion?"

"Oh, I 'm not afraid of you, Countess," retorted Axel, coolly, with a slight return of his shield-like manner.

"I should hope not, indeed," said Christina, promptly, putting on her frankest air. "Neither afraid of me nor angry with me — you 're *not* angry with me, of course, Axel?"

"By no means, Countess."

"Because if you had been either, you would have been making a great mistake, you see, and very unfair, too. Then we actually make friends, do we? Why not be friends with me as well as Betty? I should like to be on good terms with you, truly."

"Seriously, I never meant anything else, if you can take my word for it."

"Oh — well," said she, making an incredulous motion. "Shake hands upon it then, 'as a sign.' If I did vex you a little, you 'll forgive me, please?"

She laid aside her teasing and significant airs, and looked at him simply with a direct and half-pleading look that was much the nearest way to Axel's sensibility. He took the velvet hand that advanced toward him; and as if to refute her charge of ungraciousness, made an extravagant bow over it and touched it lightly with his moustache.

This was a pretty tableau, that even an interested third person might have admired without unpleasant feelings, having heard the previous conversation. Unfortunately, Betty, who had entered the house by a back way and come through to a front window, witnessed the pantomime without hearing the dialogue. She stared a moment, and then started back and never looked again, as one does who is unlucky enough to stumble on a confidential tête-à-tête. This was perfectly unaccountable. Axel behaving in that extraordinary style, who had always seemed so indifferent even to her charming sister! Poor Betty! if she could only have heard the subsequent remarks of the two performers!

"Now, then, I hope you are satisfied, Countess! Yes, I 'll forgive you, of course; only you must take back your philippic on impoliteness. I can't stand that, you know."

"Very well. You 're a perfect D' Orsay! I wonder I had n't noticed it before. — And I 'm sorry I ever worried the jackdaw!"

"Good! You 're a nice girl, Christina, after all. There! did n't you think you heard some one up at the house? I believe some one has come in from the other side. You 'll excuse me, won't you? and had n't we better go up and see who it is?"

He acted on his suggestion, and was out of sight in ten seconds.

The young lady ought to have been satisfied with getting the friendly demonstrations she had asked for. But her face, now that she was alone, did not

betray satisfaction. It wore the "crooked smile" that Betty disliked, and was colored red and white in a singular manner. She held in her hand a little lace thing that had been around her shoulders when she came out; and as she went up the path she suddenly stopped and tore the piece of lace from edge to edge with a deliberate wrench. Then she walked steadily up to the house, and shut herself into her own room.

CHAPTER XV.

A GHOST.

A DEPRESSING quiet seemed to settle on the two houses when Axel was gone. They had not certainly been very noisy while he was there; but probably it was owing to the contrast between the last busy days of his stay and the listless, half-occupied ones that followed for the people left behind.

During those "last days" there was a constant traversing the grounds between the two houses, much whistling and calling, unwonted activity on the stairways, and frequent express-parcels arriving from the city. The cause and object of all this stir was more excited than any one else. He rushed about in the most useless haste, singing and chattering as they had hardly known him to do in his knickerbocker days. Mrs. Brand quite grieved about it, that he was so eager for the separation. Betty, on some accounts, was inclined to be pleased.

And then it was over; and they had, for all resource, the consolation of reckoning days before they could expect letters from their pilgrim.

Betty went over regularly, as usual, for her talk with Mrs. Brand; but there were some things that she did not speak of, long and often as they talked of

Axel. These things she only thought about. She would have no confidante but the familiar elms, which drooped their arms over her as she whispered her doubts and sadness to them in her old childish fashion, under the evening sky.

With the cool days of autumn a plan was set on foot to send Betty to the city for a visit. She was looking paler than usual, they said; a little change would improve her, and she could attend at the same time to a number of commissions for the family. Aunt Karlsen was written to, and sent at once a cordial answer hastening her niece's coming. So the girl went away from Lyme with the last garden-flowers; and found herself again in the great rooms which had witnessed her sister's marriage-festival.

Aunt Karlsen treated Betty with uncommon warmth, for her. She had never forgotten the unflattering early interview with her niece in the nursery, although she had to admit that this tall young lady seemed as gentle as anybody could wish. But if there was one person in the world for whom Aunt Karlsen had an actual weakness, it was her niece Christina; and Betty brought the latest news of the pretty idol, and talked about her with a warm admiration that just suited her aunt.

"You are not at all like her, Betty," said the lady, taking a survey of her visitor, — "not at all; but you are much prettier than I ever thought you would be. Do you know what a horrid face you made up at me the very first time I went to see you?"

"Yes, aunt; so they tell me. But I am sure that

I never can have had a fair sight of you," said Betty, with tact, "or I could n't possibly have shown such very poor taste, even at that age."

In which Betty was not hypocritical, for she did think that enough remained of her aunt's former good looks to justify anybody yet in calling her a handsome woman. A kind of faded-leaf beauty, but beauty still. And by similar engaging remarks, with the help of her own sweet face, Miss Betty dissipated her aunt's old pique, and won her way into favor.

"I wish you to enjoy your little visit, my dear," said Aunt Bertha, "if you *do* cut it down to two weeks, which is ridiculous! I cannot go out of evenings so often as I used, on account of my health, but we will drive as much as possible by daylight; and if at any time I am prevented from going, Richards shall drive you just where you like."

Betty's tastes were simple; everything amused her. She begged her aunt not to make any exertions on her account.

"I have quantities of errands to do for the people at home, aunt," said she, — "quantities; and you have no idea how it amuses me to go on errands."

She liked walking, too; and seldom troubled Richards when her aunt was unable to go out. It was on the last day but one of her visit that she made a shopping expedition which she remembered as long as she lived.

She had fancied that all the home commissions were disposed of, but suddenly recalled a little article on Christina's list which had been overlooked.

It was a lilac feather of a certain shade; Christina wanted it for a hat to be worn on some important occasion.

"No, thank you, aunt," said Betty, "it is n't necessary to order out Richards for such a trifle. I shall like the walk. I won't be away long; and I will bring you home something nice from Laurent's — say a bag of chocolate."

Aunt Karlsen looked out of the window after her as she went down the street, and smiled agreeably. "Yes, my namesake is quite — really *quite* a pretty girl. Not like her dear sister, as I said. There is something cool and fair about her — more in John's style. But she is well-disposed and pleasing — yes, very much so!"

Betty felt exceedingly happy that day; a kind of animal happiness born of the bright spring weather, and the facts of being young, and healthy, and fair, and a wavelet of the human stream flowing through the pleasant streets. She felt very, very young — her life had been so simple, and its little romance so steady and pure.

"One's love-story must needs be very sad indeed to worry one in this delightful sunshine!" said the young girl to herself, stopping a moment in a milliner's doorway, and glancing back at the moving faces, all more or less brightened by the sunlight.

As she did so, she saw that one was stationary, and watching her.

It was not the first face that had turned toward her in her walk, and even turned after her to look at

the blonde head on the well-poised neck. But it was the first one that she had noticed particularly; and when her eye fell upon it, it seemed to hold her for an instant as by some magnetic force. And then she turned her back upon it, and went hastily in to do her errand.

"That was like the evil eye," said she to herself; "and yet he appeared to be a gentleman."

Then she forgot about it in searching for her feather, which was of a rather perplexing tint. She found it at last; and was thinking, as she came out with it in her bag, how pretty the purplish down would look curling over Christina's gold-flecked hair. And as she glanced up with a half-smile coming to her lips — there was the face again, its dark-eyed gaze at once wild and steady, full of a strange intelligence. It was not stationary any longer, but moving toward her with a visible intention. It came near enough for her to see the lines on its worn and tawny surface, the sprinkle of gray on its thin black beard; and it stopped with a suspended and breathless air.

"Betti! — I have not deceived myself? It is little Betti?"

And then a great tremor of consternation seized upon her; and she put up her hands and cried out faintly, "*Hector!*"

"Don't — don't look so terrified at me! I am sorry to frighten you, little Betti" —

"Ah, good heavens! How is this possible? It is not a ghost" —

"No, so much the worse," said the battered shadow of Hector, with a look of sardonic misery. "And yet — alas, yes; I am a ghost! It is a returned one that thou seest — yes, Betti. I come back to bring fear and repulsion; no one will smile at me now, for a ghost is not a thing to smile at — eh, my child?"

Betty was too confounded even to try for a solution of the wonder. Afterwards she remembered, in thinking over the scene, how it had not once occurred to her that there could be anything to rejoice at in this startling resurrection of "poor Hector."

"I don't understand" — she faltered out, taking a piteous scrutiny of his sallow, passion-beaten face. It was much changed; it was badly marked by illness, and was yellower than ever, with the unfortunate addition of reddish traces here and there.

"Are you sure — is it really Hector?" she stammered irrationally, not quite conscious of her words.

"Come with me," said Hector, touching her arm. "People look at us, already. Come in here. I have much to say; we must be by ourselves."

Betty followed him unsteadily.

It was a restaurant which they entered. Hector beckoned a waiter and asked for a room; they climbed a staircase to a little apartment with table and chairs, into one of which Betty dropped, quite limp; the waiter stood inclining his ear deferentially for orders. This menial had a fancy for the dramatic; he scented something of it about the sickly-looking gentleman with a queer accent, who gave his order with such a confused air — some ice

— some wine — he did not appear to care much what was brought; and the white young, blonde lady, who sat in her chair as if she never meant to move again, and hardly took her great eyes off her companion's face.

"Where is *my widow*, Betti?" said Hector, giving a hoarse, mirthless laugh as the door closed.

"At home — with us," said Betty, faintly. "Oh, Hector, what does it mean?"

"Only that I made the mistake of recovering," he answered, wiping his forehead. His hand quivered, either with passion or with weakness. "Yes, I came back to life. And to what a life, just heaven! When I regained my sense — when the fearful, the horrible sickness quitted me, my first thought was of *her*. I asked news of her incessantly; they gave me but brief answers. At last, when I was nearly well, they told me that she was gone, without a word — she left me there as a dead man, and took her flight! — And so she went back to you, did she? What insanity! Did she think, if I lived, I would not trace her out, follow her to the world's end — Ah, wretch! ah, Christina!"

"But she did think you were dead — she did indeed," cried out Betty in horror. "She came home in deep mourning."

"Mourning? ha, ha! *She did not wait to see!*" returned Hector, in a violent whisper, leaning over the table, his dark eyes flashing balefully. "She was glad of any pretext to get away from me. How does that seem to you, my little sister? What a

sweet wife I took from your father's hands! With her pretty pink face, her eyes blue as heaven, so gentle — how could one believe it of her?"

"I will not believe it," exclaimed Betty, passionately. "*My sister!* My mother's child! No, it is not possible. There must have been some mistake — there must!"

"Mistake? I tell you the only mistake was my recovery. It is the worse for me, and it is the worse — ha! yes — much worse for her. If she had cared for me at all; if it had been only in weakness, cowardice, that she fled, I could forgive" —

"I want to hear the whole of it. Tell me all your story," said Betty, bracing herself, with a feeling of being about to lift and carry a heavy burden.

("One moment — the waiter,") said Hector, warily, as the clink of a tray advanced into the room. He filled his glass and Betty's; and emptied his own at once, as if getting up strength for his recital. The waiter slowly vanished, after exhausting every possible device for lingering about this fascinating pair.

"Yes, you shall hear it all. It was for that I followed you. Your little pale face, as childlike as when I saw it last —" He broke off in a husky, groaning sound, but began again directly. "She hated me, your sister! At first she tolerated me — but I was too blind to see that that was all. Though I am a Frenchman, I was simple in those things. I was so simple as to think, 'If she will marry me it is because she gives me her heart.' No, she could not

give it to me; she has none to give. She smiled at me, your sister, because I could gratify her ambitions and her vanity. How did I find out this? Oh, it was plain — it became clear even to my simplicity, but too late! Then I grew bitter — my disappointment woke all the evil in me. I did not try to win her then; I knew it was not possible — Oh, if it had been, how long before that would she have been won! But after that — well, it is not necessary to describe the life that then passed. I am not a lamb; perhaps you know that she is not, always. And then I watched her, for she has the caprices of the butterfly — For that, too, she hated me; but she took care never to betray our happy ménage to our friends; — she is proud, you know — oh, proud as Lucifer, that sister of yours!"

He stopped here and swallowed another glassful of wine; and went on again with his rapid and broken monologue, scarcely looking at his listener, whose face was terribly pale.

"I was induced to go with some friends up the Gulf, to Muscat. I did not wish to leave her very long to her liberty, but they prevailed on me to go. You know what followed; it is something most fearful to recall, that sickness! All the time, when I could think of anything, I thought, 'Now perhaps she will be softened; when she knows how near I have come to my last hours, she will mourn a little, and try to care for me.' And they gave me up; they told her there was no possible hope of my life. What did she then, your sister? She waited

no longer, in her eagerness to have done with me, do you see? She assembled her baggages, took her maid, and fled in all haste — not an excuse, not a message left behind! Then, after many days, I came back to the world, and felt that I should live. I demanded my wife."

He stopped again and passed his handkerchief over his forehead. The black locks of hair drooping on it, gray-streaked, were all limp and moist. Betty said no word, but sat looking at him with a helpless, humiliated face, as though listening to an accusation of herself.

"When I had heard all they had to tell me," said Hector, in deepened tones, and with lurid eyes that gave ominous force to his words, "I should have lost my hold on life again, but for one thing, one hope. That was — Vengeance!"

"What did you intend to do?" Betty asked suddenly, in a faint voice.

"To live. To live," he reiterated, grimly. "To find where she had gone, and follow. Not to take her back — oh no, no, never! Never that! But to see her, and make her cringe in fear of me! To come back as you recognized me, the menacing spirit. How well you guessed me, Betti!"

"But you — you cannot want to see her now," said Betty, becoming alive by degrees to a number of formless fears. "All this being as you say, you cannot wish to see her, if you will not take her back! Why need you follow her now, when she is well away from you and safe with us? Her conscience must punish her enough"—

"*Conscience!! Pfui!* I tell you it is for me to play the rôle of conscience. Do you think I would miss my revenge for what she has made me endure? No, no! I am not the same man that I was once. I am evil — all evil!"

"Oh, no; I cannot think that. You were so good — we were all so fond of you! Think of my mother and father — of me — you were always so kind to me, the little shy girl, don't you remember? For our sake, at least, be forgiving! Do listen to me! Oh, Hector, if you cannot take her back, leave her to us, in peace; and let me keep it all a secret from every one!"

Hector stared at her as she pleaded, with a fierce, fixed face; his dark eyes were dilated, as if visions were passing before them. He was silent for a moment, and then put up both hands to clasp his forehead. "Oh Betti," he cried out suddenly, "I did love her!" And he threw himself forward on the table and burst into a fit of heavy sobbing.

Betty had seen nothing like it before. Kept sheltered all her life from violent and dramatic emotions, she would have been horrified by it in the ordinary course of things; but in this new sphere of passion and disorder to which she had been led, it seemed not unnatural. She only felt an immense pity for the man, blended with the bitterness of humiliation that his story had brought upon her.

But she did not feel like joining in his tears. She sat and thought, her pale face growing into a stony earnestness. As he became still again, she

reached out her hand and touched him softly on the shoulder.

"Poor Hector!" she said with a pitying solemnity. "I wish I could do something for you. It sounds so hard to ask you to go away; and still, what else can I do? — unless you forgive her. Will you try? — Oh my sister, my sister!"

She dropped her head in a crushed way as she said it. For many a day her eyes had been unsealed to the idol's blemishes; but never before had she faced it openly and confessed its utter weakness and deformity. There was no room for doubt of Hector's story. Truth was in every word, and every look of his wretched face; she recognized it without a question. To her sensitive, honest nature the new-found stain took on the magnitude of a capital crime, and the disgrace of it was upon her no less than upon her sister. But all her feeling now was centred in one intense wish, to shield Christina from her husband's anger, and to induce him to go away quietly and spare them, if possible, an exposure of the miserable affair. She had a wild hope that it could be done, if only her appeals would avail with the wronged and embittered man; and she was ready to take on herself the weight of such a secret if so she might spare her mother and those others whom she loved. There was all the strength and unreason of devotion behind the childish face and mild gray eyes.

But oh, the emptiness of the niche in her heart which had been filled so long by the fair image of her sister!

Hector stirred directly, and lifted his seamed, tear-flushed face. He drew a long, fatigued sigh; his ferocity seemed to have been drowned in his tears. Betty's slight hand still rested on his arm; he took it and held it in his unsteady grasp.

"Kind little Betti!" said he, in a feeble, dispirited voice. "It was a pity to torment you so. But I am evil, as I said — all evil. Do you forgive it, my good little one? Perhaps I am a little — what you call 'crack,'" he added pathetically, touching his forehead. "And you are right, and I shall do as you say, Betti — I shall keep away. Although as to conscience — no, *Dieu de Dieu*, she has none of that!"

Betty's dread began to vanish; she saw that he was a broken creature, and that the violence which had been alarming her was like the flare and sputter of a spent flame. The knowledge of this moved her to a stronger aversion for her sister's heartlessness, as she ceased to fear any vengeance on the part of poor Hector.

"If this could be repaired," said she, "if a reconciliation could be brought about — but I know, Hector, you feel that it is not possible — perhaps it is not to be wished for. Only if it *were* so, you should see how I would welcome you, and how I would do everything I could to help make you reparation. I will as it is; but there is so little — hardly anything I can do; indeed, nothing more than to give you all the sympathy that one can feel for another. Remember that a part of your burden is upon me, now. And I feel, Hector, that we never can expect her to

change; and as she is, it *would* be a hopeless thing to begin your life with her again."

"A hopeless thing," repeated Hector weakly, and looked, if possible, more crushed than ever.

Before they separated he assured Betty over and over that he would do as she wished, and not make bad matters worse by any useless scene such as he had meditated.

"You are right, Betti: France is the place for me. I will try to forget that I ever saw America. But I do not wish to forget your good little face; it shall be one of my best memories, as if the apparition of an angel in my distress. *Que le bon Dieu te bénisse, Betti!*"

He overcame some symptoms of another outburst; and they went down into the street together, and parted with a silent grasp of the hand. His forlorn figure, going away, was so much more noticeable than when he entered that the curious waiter watched him from a window, and marvelled greatly, seeing his flushed face and wavering step, that the bottle of Chambertin was so little diminished.

Betty went into an art-gallery, and sat down by herself a while before going back to her aunt's house. When she came out finally and walked along in the sunshine, it seemed as though years had rolled over her since she set off so light of heart to find Christina's lilac feather. A lilac feather! and that wretched, broken-spirited man wandering away, aimless and hopeless, to lose himself in other lands. Betty could have thrown down and trampled on the bag that held

the symbolic trifle. She remembered how earnestly Aunt Karlsen had favored Hector's suit, and wondered if the woman could have understood what she was doing. She had a moment of wrath against her; but realized very soon that the kind, frivolous creature had only acted according to her views of life for the very highest happiness of her favorite. Betty could not doubt that she would mourn as sincerely as any of them if she could know the end of all her planning.

But it must be kept from her as from the rest; and the young girl began preparing herself to look cheerful and unconcerned when her aunt's eyes should be upon her again. She was not quite successful in this, it seemed.

"Why, my dear," exclaimed the lady, as Betty walked quietly into her sitting-room, "what has kept you so long? You look as if you had been seeing spirits. Did anything happen to you? You must be ill, child, I am sure."

"No, Aunt Bertha, not ill at all," said Betty, busily pulling off her hat and gloves. "I did n't think it was so late. I am only a little tired, perhaps, with going about."

"There! I was sure of it! Perfectly exhausted!" cried Aunt Bertha, getting remorsefully agitated. "I ought to have *insisted* on Richards' taking you out! You must go at once and lie down, child, and I 'll have Willetts bring you some cordial; and would you care for any tea, or does it make you nervous, my dear?"

"Oh, Aunt Bertha, don't be troubled about me," said the girl, putting on a smile. "I am the healthiest being you ever saw, and I don't require cordial in the least. But I will go to my room, if you like, and freshen myself a trifle for dinner."

She kissed her aunt lightly and went away. But at the door she wheeled around with a dismayed air. "Oh, Aunt Bertha, I forgot your bonbons, after all!"

"Bonbons, indeed, child! You look like travelling about after bonbons to spoil your old aunt with! By the way, where 's your bag, Betty?"

"My bag — Oh, *dear* me, I don't know. If it is n't here I must have dropped it on the way home, aunt. What a careless thing!"

The bag was gone, lilac feather and all. Betty joined in her aunt's lamentations; but privately did not regret the feather, and resolved that now no article of that description should accompany her back to Lyme.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRUE EKSTROM.

ALTHOUGH Axel had not been cherishing any intentions of going to visit the Lindholms again, it was natural that they should often enter his mind when he had taken up his quarters so comparatively near them. And as he thought of them, it seemed that civility would require him to pay his respects there, when circumstances should allow him to leave England. A year passed before he was able to do this; and then he let the summer come around, as the proper time for a little Scandinavian trip. He thought he would devote a fortnight or so to it, stopping off at Lübeck to see the "Dance of Death" — an artistic duty which he had neglected in his former travels — and running up into Sweden afterwards.

There was something pleasant in treading the well-known ground again, though it had not been so very long since he left it. He strolled around by the University buildings, and thought what an ugly old pile his Alma Mater was. He met some familiar faces, and stopped here and there for a greeting. Going along the "King's New Market" he saw Max Lindholm, junior, just turning out of the curved

entrance to the Exchange. Max had done with his military duties after six months of barracks; gone into mercantile pursuits, married, and set up a nice little country-place in easy reach of the city. He was immensely stirred at the sight of his classmate, and tried to tell him all his own personal affairs on the spot.

Axel asked him concerning his sister.

"Fredrika is well. You are aware," he answered, "that she married the Councillor Ekstrom soon after your return to America. The good Councillor was untimely gathered to his fathers; and my sister is again in charge of our father's house, with the aid of old Sigbrid. They are living in the same old place this year, and you must make haste to present yourself there. But now come along with me, and let me do the honors of my little box: I am just on the way home."

Axel enjoyed his hospitality for the night; and the following day, having made a careful toilet, started in town to visit the scenes of so much former merry-making.

The relict of the good Councillor Ekstrom had received word of his arrival, with what mingled feelings may be imagined. The worthy Sigbrid felt as it were electricity in the air, and wisely kept much out of the way lest she should draw some of it upon herself. But Fredrika said very little about the expected visitor. She merely observed to Sigbrid that they would have him to dine next day; and recommended the serving of certain things which he used to praise.

Axel was pleased to see everything unchanged as he entered the house, and the very chains upon old Sigbrid's neck which he had bought for her. He shook hands with her warmly, and gave her two or three joking compliments, which delighted the old lady's soul. Then he went upstairs and was shown the room into which he used to bounce without ceremony, where now the widowed Councillor-ess sat waiting to receive him. She rose and met him with great grace; she was dressed for the occasion in imperial purple, over which her fair hair and dark eyes made a striking effect. In former days Mamsell Fredrika had been notably indifferent to dress; this was one of the very few particulars in which she had matured with her age. Axel thought her looking very handsome, yet was somewhat repelled by the stiffness of her too gorgeous satins and the formality of her bearing. This formality soon wore off, however; Fredrika was not able to keep it up. She was Fredrika still, hopelessly impulsive and undignified. She was carrying on her side of the talk before long with both purple-satin elbows squared upon the table in one of the naïve attitudes that Axel very well recollected. He was amused to notice her little fruitless attempts now and then to gather up something of her first dignity; and he thought she was much better without it. He said he was rejoiced to find the Frue Ekstrom in such good health; and how fortunate her father was in having his household still under her management!

"Yes," she said, "my father is very glad to have

me again to look after him. It is a little lonely here sometimes without Max or Albert; you know Albert has gone on a long sea-voyage to learn something of the world. My friends are very kind; I am beginning to go among them once more, as of course I could not during the past year." The Frue Ekstrom said this with an oddly solemn air, and cast a half-glance in the direction of a portrait on the opposite wall.

"That is the portrait of the late Councillor Ekstrom?" inquired Axel, respectfully, rising to look at it.

Frue Ekstrom followed him, carefully carrying her pocket-handkerchief in her hand.

"It was painted by a very good artist," said she, with quaint, measured tones; "but we do not think that he succeeded in doing full justice to the Councillor."

According to the painting, Councillor Ekstrom had been a florid person of abnormal size, whose curly white hair gave him not so much a reverend air as that of the rosy old reprobates of the Opéra comique; he maintained a pose of laborious grace, and seemed to enjoy displaying a number of orders upon his coat. Axel gazed at him in silent amazement, and could not withhold a glance from the Councillor's rubescent face at the brilliant figure beneath. Fredrika caught his eye; it seemed to vex her, for she flushed suddenly and played with her handkerchief. Axel felt a wicked desire to laugh, but saved himself by a clumsy murmur to the effect

that he should think, no doubt, the painter had not flattered, and a change of subject. His visit was not long extended after that; he received his invitation to dine, accepted it with great thanks, and took his leave. As he went away the Councillor-ess rushed to get in range of the little mirrors, placed outside the windows after an old custom, which reflected the whole street for the invisible inmate. It had been a former habit of Axel's to raise his hat playfully, in coming or going, to anybody within whom he could not see, but who might perhaps be there looking at him. He did it now mechanically, throwing back a bright upward glance at the little angle of mirrors.

He had scarcely passed from sight before the old housekeeper bustled in, smiling, short-breathed. "Is he coming to dinner to-morrow, Mamsell Fredrika?"

"Yes, Sigbrid."

The old woman paused, and looked at her mistress — the sky seemed to be clear. "Wilt thou have a charm put in the soup to-morrow, dearest Mamsell?" she ventured, with a face at once humorous and anxious.

Fredrika did not take it ill; she laughed a little, excitedly, then became grave and meditated. "Ah, Sigbrid," she said, earnestly, "it is just the same! It is all just the same!"

"The same, my Fredrika?"

"Yes — you understand. I am happy now, for the moment; but how long will it last? I was doing very well before this; it was stupid and lonesome,

and a blank, but one can endure that. When you hurt your hand, and it is numb, you don't mind so much; the worst of it is when it begins to wake up and tingle."

She dropped down on a sofa, embracing her elbows, in one of her negligent attitudes, quite disregarding the claims of the purple satin raiment.

"My dearest!" Sigbrid remonstrated, just as she used to when the baby Fredrika damaged her best frock, "do be careful of that beautiful satin! Look how you are treating it — and it crushes so quickly, too!"

Her wilful mistress paid no attention, but stayed in her crumpled posture, appearing to ruminate on the preceding moments. Her eye rose to the painting of her late husband; she seemed to recall something, reddened and started up, angrily. "He laughed at it, Sigbrid," she broke out; "he laughed at the Councillor's portrait!"

"Oh, dear Mamsell," exclaimed Sigbrid, who had deeply reverenced the late Councillor's importance, "I cannot imagine it of the Herr Brand!"

"Of course he did not laugh openly; but I could see in his face how it took him by surprise. It was not — not what he had expected to see. And then I caught his eye, and there was amusement it. Oh, but I was angry, Sigbrid!"

Frue Ekstrom paced about with a red and tearful face, tugging at the corners of her handkerchief.

"My child, my best child," Sigbrid coaxed her, "do be calm! There may be great things in store

for you. At any rate the Herr Brand is here again, and you will see him often while he remains."

"Yes," Fredrika said, with a long sigh, "he is here; and I hope to see him often. It will be my fault," she added, suddenly, in a passionate tone, "if I ever lose sight of him again!"

Sigbrid wagged her headdress ominously as she slid out of the room. Many a wag of the headdress had Mamsell cost the good nurse. She had caught a flash of significant resemblance to the buried Else Oersted in her mistress's dark eyes.

Axel availed himself fully of the freedom of entrance which they all urged upon him. He had, as we know, the "art of making himself at home in other people's houses," which in a thoroughly agreeable man is such an added charm, and which is so ill-understood on these shores. The Danes — most hospitable of people — quite appreciated him. He was loaded with attentions from old acquaintances, but preferred to keep mostly with the Lindholms, since he had made the journey principally on their account. Fredrika planned excursions, and showed herself a genius in conducting them. Max greatly enjoyed it all, and began to wish within himself that it might be managed to keep his friend permanently in Copenhagen.

"I wish you could, Brand," said he, "I really do! There are places enough open to you. We should all be so delighted. Fredrika has such a high regard for you. There is something of the daemon about my sister," he continued, reflectively, "but it is a good

little daemon, after all. Do you know, I wish you could persuade her to fall in love with you!"

Axel did not feel it civil to say that he had no idea of trying to persuade her; so he reserved the thought for himself, and uttered some polite banalities in a nice diplomatic jumble that might be understood almost anyhow.

But Fredrika really interested him very much, with all her oddities, simplicities, and streaks of temper like heat-lightning; she was so pretty, too, in her singular way, and there was such a touching awkwardness in some of her unstudied movements. He even thought several times that he should be sorry to leave her, and that he would arrange to run over to Denmark again for his next holiday. He had not yet mentioned to them the probable limit of his stay; and they had quite the air of expecting him to spend the summer there. As the fortnight wore away, he thought it would be well to correct that impression; and went around to the Lindholms', meaning to do so before he left the house.

It was half-twilight when he looked into Fredrika's sitting-room. She was alone and sprinkling her flowers at the window. She was more simply dressed than usual, in white; there was something about the light-haired figure, unaware of Axel, in its drooping attitude over the plants, that reminded him of Betty. He stood looking at her in the uncertain light, his thoughts for the moment more in America than Denmark; and then she turned and started so that the mug of water sprinkled the skirt of her dress.

"Thoughtless Herr Axel!" she cried, mopping at it with her handkerchief. "Why did you stand there in the dark hall peering in at me like a bravo?"

"I was innocently looking at the tableau, Madame Fredrika," said he. "I am very sorry to have caused a deluge."

"It's nothing," said Fredrika, gayly. "I will forgive you because I want to make an accomplice of you. I have a scheme on foot in which you will be interested."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Axel cordially. "The question is, whether the time involved in your scheme is going to balance with the time at my disposal. You know I haven't much more of that article at my command."

"What!" said Fredrika, the brightness dying instantly out of her face. "You are not thinking of leaving us again?"

"My dear friend," said Axel playfully, "do you forget that I have any business but pleasure? I had no idea of staying more than a fortnight at the most."

"A fortnight!" breathed Fredrika, looking at him as if he were already fading from view. "A fortnight! And what shall we do then?"

"Do you want to add to my self-conceit?" said Axel, with a caressing laugh. "I did not realize that I was such an important person" — which was an unconscious fib.

"A fortnight!" she repeated. "That leaves only three days more. Why, it's *impossible!* You *can't*

go then! Do you know when Max's birthday comes?"

"I have forgotten. Soon, I think."

"One week from to-day. See, this is what we are intending to do. We are going to make up a party of his special friends and drive out to his country-house for a surprise, with all the preparations for a grand supper; and we are to have music, a serenade of instruments; and afterwards they will dance in the hall — you know what a nice little hall Max has on purpose for such affairs. Now, you can't be so obstinate as to say you will spoil the whole occasion for us! You *will* stay, won't you?"

"It 's a delightful plan," said Axel, "and you know I should be most happy to join in it; but" — He thought of the trip through Sweden, and of some people he had half-agreed to meet there; of possible shooting, and a new game-bag strapped up among his impedimenta; and remained unshaken.

"Were you going directly back to England?" Fredrika demanded.

Then he admitted the game-bag, and the shooting possibilities.

"But you were not going on your excursion alone. Had you promised to meet any one?"

He admitted that also; a party of friends would probably be looking out for him next week.

"*Old* friends? older friends than we are?" Fredrika persisted.

He laughed at her indulgently, as at a spoiled child. "They are not so very old — about my age, on an

average. Well, they 're a party of young English fellows, and there are one or two very good shots among them. It 's a pleasant opportunity for me to do the country and try my luck with the black-cock. Should n't you like to have me send you a nice little box of black-cock down ? "

" No, I don't care at all about the black-cock," said Fredrika, impatiently, with a film of tears over her dark eyes. " You might go shooting here with Max, instead of leaving us for a 'party of English fellows ! ' "

" And shoot what ? Storks, or sandpipers ? " said Axel, jokingly. But the girl had no ear for jokes ; she sat with her hands hanging down, and her head turned partly away ; but there was still light enough for him to see that she was the picture of forlorn woe, with the tears running helplessly over her face.

This was awful. He had not really thought she would care like that.

" You don't mean to say it 's of so much consequence to you ! " burst out the soft-hearted fellow, jumping up in acute distress. " Oh don't, now, *don't !* Good heavens ! Why, four days' difference — Look here, Fredrika, I 'll throw over the shooting — I will indeed ; and I 'll stay over Max's birthday, and help about the surprise ! Now, will *that* suit you ? "

CHAPTER XVII.

EXPLANATIONS.

AUNT KARLSEN had tried hard to prolong her niece's visit, but Betty would not be persuaded. She had a nervous dread of seeing her sister again, and wanted to get it over. She did not know whether she would tell Christina at once or not; that had better be left to chance, she thought.

Of course she had begun to puzzle out apologies for her sister's conduct, though it was rather a hopeless attempt. Her favorite reflection was that poor Christina was so childish, after all! She must have acted on a moment's impulse, and been afraid afterwards to confess or investigate. It was proof enough of her childishness that she had dared to come home to them with her fictitious grief and mourning-mummeries, and was able to take things so easily and smoothly. But Betty remembered the pale, fixed face that she had sometimes surprised alone, the blue eyes all darkened and thoughtful. What misgivings were then visiting the shallow heart? and was there by any possible chance a conscience there to be stirred?

It hardly looked like it, thought Betty, as she met

Christina in fine raiment, waiting with the others on the doorsteps to welcome her back.

"Why, she looks as pale as ever, mamma, upon my word!" cried the young lady airily, releasing Betty from her violet-silk embrace.

"Our lily is more like a wax-lily than before, I regret to see," said Dr. Brand, holding her off with a paternally anxious face.

"My dear love," said her mother, "what has Aunt Bertha been doing with you, that you come home to me looking like the survivor of a wreck?"

"Bertha must have piled on the gayety pretty heavily," added Mr. Karlsen, "to have finished the child up like that in two weeks' time! A nice way to recuperate!"

"Why, my precious people," Betty protested, trying with all her might to look rosy, "something is the matter with your eyes! I never was better, truly; Aunt Bertha has taken the greatest care of me. She is very quiet now, and seldom gives entertainments."

"I hope Aunt Bertha is n't getting dull," said Christina. "I can't fancy her being dull. Is she moping without me, do you think?"

"No, I did n't notice that she moped," Betty answered, turning away. Christina's sprightly assurance hurt her; the rustling puffs and ruffles irritated her. She saw all the time an image of an unhappy face, a prone and miserable figure tossed by its sobbing; and her heart grew older and heavier every hour with remembering it.

"But I will not say anything yet," she thought; "not until I see some reason for it."

Mr. Musgrove came next day and spent the afternoon with them. Christina made a special toilet for the occasion, and put into her belt a cluster of hothouse flowers from a dish in the parlor. "Where did you get those?" Betty asked her.

"Some one gave them to Mr. Musgrove yesterday," Christina answered, with a pretty cock of the head, "and he sent them in to me. Was n't it charming of him?"

They had a letter from Axel to discuss before dinner; and after it Mr. Musgrove sang and Christina played for him, and the two talked apart in the intervals. Betty sat on a hassock against her mother's knee, looking on in a tired kind of way.

"Mr. Musgrove seems to enjoy himself very well. He is such an interesting young man," murmured her mother, watching them with a gentle significance just falling short of a smile. "It is very pleasant for Christina, but I hope she is not inclined to trifle with him."

"Trifle with him?" repeated Betty, lifting her head suddenly. "What do you mean, mamma?"

"Oh, bless you, dear, you need n't defend her! I 'm sure the poor child would n't consciously hurt him for anything; but after all, they say there 's a love of power in everybody, and it 's more of a temptation to try it on a person when he gets into a state of subjection, no doubt."

"Do you mean to say, mamma," whispered Betty

with unconcealed horror, "that Mr. Musgrove has taken a fancy to Christina, and that she knows and allows it?"

"Well, really, my dear," smiled her mother, in a deprecating way, "why not? Have n't we all been wishing that Christina's mind could be diverted from her troubles? Indeed, I think it would be a very good thing for her. Now that she is out of mourning, you know, there 's nothing singular about it. We certainly don't want her to renounce the world, dear. No one could advise that for her, I 'm sure, at her age — and with her face."

Mrs. Karlsen's eyes rested on her elder child with a gleam of motherly admiration. She had easily taken up the habit of affection which Christina's wilful girlhood had denied her; she was perhaps making up to herself for that long season of partial estrangement.

Betty saw the look in her mother's face.

"No," said she to herself, sinking back in determined silence, "my mother must not know. I am afraid to have her know. Whether I am wrong and foolish or not, while I can help it she never shall know!"

The flowers were gone from Christina's belt when she came upstairs that night with her candle. Betty noticed it from where she leaned waiting against the window. Once she would not have observed such a trifle with suspicion, but that time of happy simplicity was gone away forever. She had heard Christina humming one of the rector's songs as she mounted

the staircase, and her heart instantly hardened. Her small pale face was paler than usual; she felt that its look was stern, and she did not try to soften it.

Christina was not slow of observation either; she flashed a ray from the candle toward her sister before setting it on the mantel. A rosy wood-fire was crackling below in their little grate; the two lights blended softly and painted her lovely hair. She pulled off its ribbon and shook it into a cloud around her face.

"There 's a frost to-night," said she, patting her white hands together, with a sidelong inquiring glance. "Don't stay there by the cold window, child! You look frozen. Why don't you come over by the fire and get warm?"

"I don't see your flowers, Christina," said Betty, passing over the question. "You have lost them out."

Her sister laughed, and fingered the despoiled belt. "Well, not exactly. They have returned whence they came. Our clerical friend took a violent fancy to have them back; and so, as he seemed to want them a great deal more than I did — I let him."

"I suppose," Betty said frigidly, after a slight pause, recalling Rose Harrod's chatter, "that it is what they call flirting, is n't it?"

"Why — you may call it that if you like," said Christina, looking rather astonished. "Very mild sort, though, I should say. What makes you so odd,

Betty, to-night? Suppose we *call* it flirting, have you any objections?"

"Can you think of no reason," returned Betty, calmly, "why one should object? No reason why you ought to be shocked at the mere idea of such a thing?"

"You are very old-fashioned, child — more than I imagined. Shocked, indeed! Mamma has n't showed any signs of being shocked at me, yet; and"—

"Oh, Christina, she does n't know — she does n't know — what I know!"

"'Does n't know?' What do you mean?"

Christina's color varied, and her eyes blackened as she darted them sharply into her sister's face.

"No; and she must n't know — nobody must but we two. I will keep it — I will help you. Last week, in the city, I saw a ghost" —

"A ghost!" Christina gave a little cry, and glanced shiveringly over her shoulders.

"Hush! — no, not a ghost," Betty went on, moving nearer the fire, "though I almost thought so at first. But it spoke with me, in the street; and it was — it was — like one raised from the dead!" She stopped, clasping her hands, and hoping that her sister would understand. And she did.

"Do you mean," she asked immediately, in a hard whisper, "that you saw *him?*"

"Yes," answered Betty, "I saw *him.*"

"Then," said Christina, slowly, "they were wrong? They deceived me?"

"They *were* deceived — yes."

The two looked at one another in silence for some moments — it seemed a long, long time; and Christina's face settled into the white mask of apprehension that it sometimes wore when she was alone. Then she slowly cowered down into a little chair that stood before the grate, and held by its arms like a terrified child. She seemed all at once quite another creature.

"I am afraid," she said in a smothered voice. "I don't know what he'll do! Oh, *what* did he come here for? But I never will go to live with him again, never, never — not for all the money in India!"

"You need not be troubled about that; he does not wish to take you back. And he will not do anything to hurt you; he is on his way home already. You will never see him again."

"Oh, are you sure?" She shook her head in frightened doubt. "You don't know him. Oh, dear, dear!" She commenced to rock back and forth, wringing her small fingers. "*Why* could n't he have died?"

"Hush, Christina!" said the other sternly. She was perceiving more clearly the extent of the gulf that separated her from her sister. "You must control yourself. This may perhaps be kept to ourselves — I mean that it shall. I have carried it about with me now for — oh, only for a week, but it has seemed like years. And I shall carry it to the end of my life, and you will do the same. This is for the sake of my mother and the family. Perhaps

you can understand why I *will* have it kept from my mother, at all costs. I don't know what effect such a disgrace might not have upon her. You have played your part quite perfectly all this time; surely you can play it through."

Betty was not able to keep the bitterness out of her tone, and she expected that her sister would be stirred to a defence, or to a show of remorse. But Christina's mind seemed completely absorbed in fear for her own safety. "How did you happen to meet him?" she asked, eagerly. "Was he looking for me? What could have kept him from going straight to Aunt Bertha?"

"I suppose he had just come into the city," Betty answered dully. "He found me by the merest chance. I was of course too much startled to ask all the questions that I have thought of since." She shuddered in recalling the scene; but this did not seem to affect her listener, who leaned forward putting up her nervous apprehensive face. "Why did you do it, Christina?"

"*I* do it! Do *what?* You are not going to hold me responsible for his appearance, I hope — me, of all people! when I 'd give anything if he were only six feet underground at Bombay, where I supposed he was — yes, I would! I can't imagine what you mean!"

Betty stared down at her, doubting her own eyes and ears. No, there was not a shade of self-condemnation on that pretty, agitated face, no breaking of the voice except the quaver of selfish alarm.

"I mean," she said distinctly, "your conduct in the whole affair from the first; but in particular your last freak of abandoning your sick husband — deceiving us with false reports of his death — with your mourning — in every way — for mercy's sake, Christina, you can't need to be *told* what you have done!"

"Why," exclaimed Christina, "why, I was not deceiving you! I was deceived myself. They told me he was the same as dead — you know they did. There was not the least chance for him. What was the use of risking my life by staying in that awful place, when I *knew* he was not going to get well! I can tell you I was glad enough to make my escape. There was Lisette frightened out of her senses about the spread of the epidemic, and I was not much better! I thought my life was of *some* value, but it seems as though you would n't agree with me. Perhaps you would be glad to have me go back and expose it over again!"

Her voice mounted a little, and she showed some disposition to cry.

Betty remained unmoved. "And so," said she, "you have been quite easy in your mind about it all this time!"

"Easy? Why, indeed I have not! I can't think what you take me for! It would come into my head, every little while, 'What if the doctors were mistaken, after all?' or, 'What if he should make up his mind to get well, so as never to let me away from under his dreadful eye?' — for you see if he once made up his

mind to get well, all the doctors in India would n't have made any difference! Oh, you see you don't know him. No, you have no idea what I have gone through with that man! If you had you would n't wonder that I snatched at the first chance to get away from him. I suppose he told you that I hated him, did he?"

"Yes," said Betty.

"Well, he was right. I do! Anybody would, kept like a state prisoner as I was. And always being raved at, and reproached with accepting him for his wealth! As if that was n't a natural reason enough! What should he *suppose* I accepted him for, I wonder?"

She stopped to dwell upon the hopeless absurdity of the question.

"Of course," she went on, as Betty made no attempt at answering it, "I could n't have come away if he had been expected to live. I felt as if something was pushing me and saying, 'Take your chance, quick, now that he can't stop you!' And I hardly slept till we got into France. The mourning, you know — why, what else could I have done? What would you have thought to see me without it? I thought if anything *should* happen — if there *was* any mistake, you know — I should have had a breathing-space at the least. I *would n't* stop to think anything further about it. As for telling you and mamma all the particulars — why, it did n't seem at all the right thing. It would only have disturbed you, and you would not have understood."

"No, I dare say we should not have understood," said Betty, with faintly ironical wonder. She stood contemplating the image of excited beauty in the firelight, and recalling fragments of Hector's feverish talk. Some bare vines flicked against the window-panes; the east wind blew mourningly through them, around the house-corner, and reminded her of his demonstrative wretchedness.

"He spoke," she said, pondering, after a while, "as though he had been some time looking for you. I remember that he implied not being at all certain where you had gone. I don't understand that. How could he help knowing that you would come straight home?"

"Ah! Perhaps," said Christina, meditating, "perhaps he fancied I had gone away with some one."

"With some one?" Betty said after her. "With whom should you have gone away?"

"Why, I *should n't*, of course; but he was so abominably suspicious he would be just as likely as not to think so! There was more than one I might have gone away with, if I had been that kind of a light-headed person."

A smile actually glimmered in her eyes, through all her disturbance, at those flattering recollections. The smile was unintelligible to Betty; but the words forced themselves into her reluctant understanding. For Betty had never read Balzac; and the world set forth in his unsparing pages was as strange to her as it was fatally familiar to Christina. Even after all she

had learned, such speeches as this came, and would always come, with a fresh shock upon her innocence. In her utter disgust and dejection she forgot to be thankful for the mitigating fact that at least her sister had not gone away "with some one."

She turned her back upon her and walked despairingly to the window again. It had been a strain upon her nerves. She felt herself weakening, and the tears ran suddenly down her cheeks. A load of disgrace seemed to rest on her helpless shoulders; for a moment she almost wished that her mother knew, so that she might go to her for comfort.

While Christina was occupied in talking about herself her fears had retired to the background; but now she was seized with a fresh access of alarm. She got up and began to pace back and forth, keeping up a distressed murmur about what "he" would be certain to do; and finished by throwing herself on the bed face downward, in a fit of nervous crying.

Betty looked on stonily, her own tears checked. "I am getting quite hard," she thought. "But it is better to see her like this than so light and unfeeling. It does n't seem to me as if I could ever touch her again! How *can* she belong to us? I would sooner think she was a 'changeling,' such as my old storybooks told of."

Then, as her sister gave no signs of becoming quiet, but kept up a sort of hysterical gasping which

might be heard beyond the room, she went and tried to hush her.

"Christina, mamma will hear you; and it is not of the least use to have hysterics now. I told you no one was going to hurt you; and as long as you are not concerned about anything else, you may as well make yourself easy. Come! He has gone away, I am certain; I have his promise not to disturb you. Do hush! Maria is going across the landing."

By and by Christina was still; and then came a turn of the tide in her spirits as sudden as if she had been perhaps ten years old.

"To be sure," said she, sitting up on the bed and heaving a long, relieved sigh. "I should n't think he *would* want to see me again now. Not because he does n't care about me, of course. But he knows very well how unhappy he made me, and I have no doubt his conscience reproaches him! He knows that nothing would induce me to go back, once I got away. But I was terribly frightened, at first — so vindictive as he is, and so unmanageable! — Did he look very, very ugly, Betty? The mere thought of him makes me creep!"

"There is one thing, Christina," said Betty with earnestness, as she recalled her starting-point, "that must positively stop, and that is your behavior to Mr. Musgrove. He shall not be played with; and it is perfectly abominable for you to like it, under the circumstances."

"I have no intention," returned Christina haughtily, "of injuring your Mr. Musgrove in the least."

She went to sleep afterwards readily enough, though dreams visited her and made her talk and cry out once or twice. Her wakeful companion spoke to her and laid a steady little hand upon her arm. After that she slept silently; and Betty lay and listened to her full, soft breathing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRINCE FALLS UNDER A SPELL.

IT was a hard year for Betty. She used to wish sometimes that her sister would go and spend it with Aunt Karlsen, and so relieve her for a while from part of her daily trial.

For Christina by no means retained the serenity with which she fell asleep in the last chapter. She behaved as usual among the family, but made up for it when alone with Betty by long and extraordinary unfoldings of her mental processes. She seemed to find great satisfaction in rehearsing the grievances of her life with Hector; and she put on at those times an air of mysterious confidence that tried and disgusted poor Betty, and made her feel like a partner in some piece of wickedness. There was but one thing from which she could get any comfort in this connection. It was a suspicion that her sister's strangely warped or stunted moral nature was undergoing some change, as time went on, perhaps through contact with the healthier natures in her father's household. Her monologues on the theme of her domestic trials began to take a defensive tone, as though with a dawning sense that some-

thing in the way of apology might not be uncalled for.

Now and then Betty found her alone and seeming to meditate, with that wan fixed look, which she no longer took the trouble to hide at her sister's coming. Yet, if visions of her errors haunted and condemned her, she cowered before them in silence and never brought herself to confess it, although by-and-by the flood of her querulous confidences seemed to have received a check.

Betty, of course, softened toward her in making these observations, and in seeing her demeanor toward Mr. Musgrove, from whom, for a long time, she pointedly kept aloof. It did not last, however.

The rector continued his visits as usual during the year; but no more of his flowers adorned Christina's belt-ribbon or the drawing-room vases. Mrs. Karlsen noticed a change of atmosphere, and also became sensible of Christina's nervousness and uneven moods.

"It seems to me," she said to Betty one day, "that I am constantly having to worry over one or the other of my children. First I worry about your health because you look paler than usual; and then I worry about Christina's health because she grows so serious. Don't you see that she is growing serious, instead of getting more like herself? Your papa has noticed it, too. How do you account for it, dear?"

Betty tried to account for it in some reassuring way, to avoid more questioning; and afterwards

warned her sister that she was becoming an object of family anxiety.

Christina started and fluttered at the suggestion. Certainly she was very much more nervous than she used to be.

But she evidently took the warning to heart, and made quite successful efforts after that to revive the careless airiness to which they were accustomed in her as a young girl. At the same time she ceased her avoidance of Mr. Musgrove.

Twice the spring rains fell, setting all the Lyme roads afloat and washing the garden-beds clear of snow. For the second time had the black earth turned green, and crocuses mottled it prettily here and there. A mysterious sweetness crept into the air, recalling to Betty the old springtimes when she waited with childish impatience for Axel to come home. This springtime would not bring him, nor would many another. It brought news of him, truly; news that spoiled the sunshine of the May days, and of his mother's beautiful eyes.

Betty felt that something was wrong, but dared not ask. Then she caught a glimpse of the Doctor's face one day, in his library, so troubled and wrathful that she hardly knew it; and for the first time heard him speak angrily in his wife's presence. Mrs. Brand came out directly, closing the door behind her; and went toward Betty with her face as pale as wax.

"He had better be alone a while," said she. "Go over and tell your mamma, dear, that I will come to her in a half-hour or so."

The girl slipped home in dismayed haste. She gave the message; and went to walk up and down the darkened music-room till Mrs. Brand's long conference with her mother was over. There was a premonition in her heart which grew and grew, and she would not try to drive it away. That old vision of the Deer-forest rose before her again: the carriage-load of gay pleasure-hunters, of whom she was not one; and the fair moonlit face with flying hair, whose name she had never forgotten — how very fair it was! It flitted before her in the darkness, mockingly. She was certain — absolutely certain — of what she should presently hear. She stole upstairs, as soon as the side-door had shut, and she had seen her friend's figure, muffled in a shawl, glide despondently along the footpath.

"Mamma, may n't I come in? What has Axel been doing? I know he is not ill, for the Doctor is so angry. But he must have done something very dreadful — do tell me!"

"Well, yes, poor fellow, it is rather dreadful — for his parents. We can't call it exactly criminal; still I don't wonder that the Doctor is angry. It seems that Axel has engaged himself to a lady over there, with never a word to his father and mother; and they heard of it only two days ago."

"It is so, then! Yes, I was — I suspected it was something of that kind" — Betty hoped that her face was steady. She knew that her voice was not, but trusted to her mother's excitement for escape from notice.

"And now Axel himself writes to tell them of it; and to cap the climax, says that the marriage will have taken place by the time they read his letter! He admits that he feared his father's disapproval; that was why he kept it all so quiet. Their first intimation of it came from the Doctor's friend, Mr. Lindholm."

"It is that Fredrika, then, I suppose," Betty interjected.

"Oh, you remember her name, dear? Yes, it is the Fredrika he used to tell us of; but she was no longer a Miss Lindholm. She had been married to a prominent man, a Councillor Ekstrom, who died shortly after. I suspect, from Mrs. Brand's account, that she had all along been fond of Axel; and they seem to feel that he has been rather drawn into it in spite of himself. They can only surmise, of course, at this distance. Poor Mrs. Brand says she is willing already to forgive her, if only she will make him happy."

"Yes, one can forgive her, if she will make him happy," echoed Betty, softly.

"But the Doctor is not going to take it so easily. He is terribly grieved and bitter against Axel, and enraged at the Lindholms."

"Oh, he looked so this morning, mamma, you can't think! I was frightened at him. How is it that he minds so much, when Mr. Lindholm was such a dear friend of his? Of course, Axel behaved very badly in leaving them out of the question; but it is not as though he had married some one whom they

could not accept. It might have been worse, might n't it?"

"Why, you see, my dear, Axel is so young — in their eyes at least. And if you remember, this Fredrika is considerably older than he; some years older, at any rate. Besides, there is the uncertainty which they must feel about her fitness for him — a complete stranger to them! It is very bitter for them both; I can appreciate it."

Mrs. Karlsen thought of other reasons, too, why it should be bitter for the Doctor, but she did not speak them. She only murmured again, in soft sympathy: "Axel is so young, and so honest. Poor Axel!"

"Poor Axel!" repeated Betty very gently, with a long breath.

After that she went away quietly, and had another half-hour of solitude in her refuge, the music-room. Whether she indulged in any private lamentation or not, there were no witnesses except the kind but stony faces of her musical idols around the walls. If any tears were wasted on that occasion, no disappointment was mingled with them. She had expected nothing better, so there could be no disappointment. If it was not to be Fredrika Lindholm, why then it would be some other woman over there; that was settled in her mind long ago. In spite of all her visions and air-castles — and few girls had more — and in spite of the teasings of her friend Rose, she had never figured in those visions as the chosen of the Prince. He was always fond of her; but she had a feeling that the highest honor

was reserved for some fair unknown in the broad circle of the world where her Prince was free to travel, and toward which she looked wonderingly and with a kind of gentle envy. He would come back to her some time — oh yes, that was certain; but as he had always come — in no other wise.

Betty must have been a super-earthly young lady if she had not found some satisfaction in recalling that the new Mrs. Brand was once Mrs. Somebody-else, and was now a good deal older than Axel. But this bit of selfishness she dismissed very soon; and threw all the warmth of her warm heart into the reiterated wish that Axel might be happy, might be always and absolutely happy!

When she went into her own room after the half-hour, Christina was there, restlessly tumbling over some ribbons on her dressing-table. She looked up as her sister entered, showing a red spot on each cheek. Betty felt quite sure at once that she knew all about Mrs. Brand's letter.

"Well," said she presently, in a rather high-keyed voice, "it is a pretty affair, is n't it?"

"Did mamma tell you about it?" asked Betty calmly.

"I heard her telling you. I happened to be in papa's dressing-room, and overheard a little. Your Axel has got himself into a nice fix, it seems, with his infatuated old lady!"

"She is not an old lady at all," said Betty, instantly taking up arms for the unknown bride. "She is a sister of one of his classmates, and she is only a

few years older. Axel would never have married an old lady. Perhaps she is infatuated — I should n't wonder in the least."

"Of course she is — did n't his mother say so? One would not have fancied that the poor fellow was so simple! He 'll be sorry enough before long, I dare say; perfectly sick of life, most probably."

"Oh, I hope not! I do hope she will be good to him! Indeed, I am sure she will," said Betty, turning away to her work-basket. She was irritated by her sister's tone, and resolved not to discuss the subject any further with her. But Christina, she found, was disposed to keep on talking.

"Perhaps now," went on the older young lady, after a moment of energetic fluttering among the ribbons, "perhaps now you 'll condescend to take more favorable notice of Jack Leavitt, after this. It is n't often that a man of his value can be found waiting round so patiently, ready to play Hobson's choice any time you like."

The younger sister's cool Northern temperature suddenly rose several degrees.

"May I ask," said she, with her small head very upright, "why you should expect me to take any more notice of Mr. Leavitt — 'after this?'"

"You 'll be very foolish if you don't. You were very foolish not to have done so before now, in my opinion; but of course every one must judge for herself, and if you were so desperately fond of Axel Brand all along, you naturally did n't care to notice Jack. *Now*, however" ——

"Christina," said the younger girl, in a tone of mingled despair and disgust, "I don't know whether you can possibly understand this or not, but I hope you 'll try. Jack Leavitt and his property are a matter of absolute indifference to me, quite independent of any other person or circumstance; and as for Axel, fond of him as I certainly am, I have never once expected anything from him but the old friendship and regard which I am sure he will always give me."

"Really?" said Christina, expressing perfect incredulity by her manner. "Well, that is fortunate, of course. He has n't done anything so very surprising, after all, as boys go. They are apt to make fools of themselves, when they are left to their own devices. But I did give this one credit for exceptional good sense; and now to think that he has let himself be chased and actually captured by an ancient widow — ah, bah!"

Here Betty made the only malicious remark she ever addressed to her sister. "At any rate, I suppose she was a genuine widow."

And then she walked away with her needlework, and sat down at a distance, with her back turned upon her companion.

Christina did not count a hasty temper among her failings. She was always able to control herself when she found it politic to do so; and she could not afford to quarrel with her only confidante. So she said nothing more on this occasion, but let the cloud pass over harmlessly, only showing by a

change of color that she had noticed her sister's little fling.

Axel's "mistake," as his friends at home generally called it, served as a topic of conversation for much more than the nine days of the old saying. The Karlsens talked of it sparingly, out of sympathy with their neighbors in the stone cottage, who were finding the path to reconciliation a very steep and brambly one.

The Rev. Mr. Musgrove expressed his wonder volubly, with a discreet air of hidden amusement.

Mr. Goodwillie took the news as a shock, rather surprising those who knew how little there was in common between him and the Brands. They would have been yet more surprised if they could have read his honest heart, or heard the inaudible sigh that shook it as his eyes fell on Betty's calm face. He divined something behind the placid little mask that her nearest friends had not seen. How promptly, if he could, would he have recalled that errant Prince, dissolved his newly-made ties, and handed him over to Betty, if so that smile of hers might be a mask no longer, but a genuine glow of content. Unselfish, golden-hearted "old bachelder!"

But the smiling maid was unaware of his thoughts and his sympathy — happily, for she was very proud, and her pride made her cunning, even to holding her mask so firmly that no one should suspect graver looks beneath it. Very soon the caution became a habit; she needed no effort to smile as naturally as ever, for there was nothing morbid in her dreamy temperament.

By the time that the lilac-trees under the windows had burst into pinkish-purple masses of sweetness, and all the company of elms were doing their best to obstruct her view of the highroad, life seemed quite smooth and rational again to Betty. She walked in the beloved shade of the old trees with the light foot of her childhood; the long branches were longer and thicker by twelve years' growth than when she felt her first grief over Axel. Late events flitted over her mind like the restless shadows on the path. She felt herself older for them and more sober, but not unhappy. Indeed, she now and then wondered how it was that she was so cheerful. "Why, because you are well, and working for other people," she apostrophized herself, crossing the fields toward the workmen's cottages with her basket. "And it is so lovely here in your dear old village! and you have Mrs. Brand and the Doctor, besides your own people; and ever so many happy years to count over, that nobody can take away from you. Why should n't you be cheerful, foolish girl?"

"Working for other people" formed a part of her daily routine; it meant something beside the "flannels and soup," the formula which ruled Mrs. Karlsen's early charities in old Surrey. It meant kind little chats with tired housewives; bits of sewing for the children; garden-flowers and dainty morsels for sick ones; a firm little hand stretched out here and there, ready to give what they called a "lift" over some rough place. Perhaps Lyme was not any better stocked with poor people than most towns of its

size; but Betty found enough to do where another would have found much less.

So she was reasonably happy; and, better still, she knew it. Her chief thorn — it pricked rather sharply sometimes — was, of course, Christina. This young lady had fallen back into her reprehensible ways with the rector, who hung about the house more than ever, and caused unspeakable concern to Betty. She put off remonstrance as far as possible, having got into a nervous dread of scenes, or indeed of any serious intercourse with her sister.

Coming home late one afternoon from a long, tiresome walk, Betty and her empty basket entered by a little back veranda opening into the music-room. She dropped down on a sofa shaded by the window-curtain, for a moment's rest; and leaning back there, with her cheek on her folded hands, she fell asleep, and began after a while to dream. It seemed that somebody was ill — she thought it was herself, and yet she was sitting by and looking on; and Christina passed through the room laughing, and carrying a bunch of flowers in her hand. And all the time there was a steady low murmur of voices going on somewhere — perhaps a consultation; and Betty, watching in her dream, began to think that Betty who was *being* watched must be very ill indeed. By and by she found herself really awake; but the murmuring still went on, and twilight had fallen heavily around her.

"— never can be effaced," one voice was saying, in accents of dolorous sweetness. "Oh, never!

Those things blight one's life. I am as *different* from what I used to be — years ago! If one could only rid oneself of these sombre memories — but they cling, they cling! It is painful to refer to them; I seldom do. Only at certain moments they are apt to come to the surface — when one is tempted by a sympathetic presence, by the consciousness of being understood, and — and " —

"Finish your sentence," said the other voice, deeply.

" — and valued perhaps — a little," murmured the first voice, almost in a whisper. It was Christina's.

"'Valued' — You may well say that. Good heavens, how colorless words can seem sometimes! Well, that one must get used to. Oh, if those gloomy remembrances could be driven away by any power of mine, how quickly you would be free from them! You are sure of that, I think?" This was the Reverend Mr. Musgrove's voice, and it sounded very soft and mysterious. They had probably returned from a walk together, and stopped to sit on the little veranda, whence their conversation stole in, close by Betty's drowsy head. Up to this point she had listened sleepily, quite still and astonished; then her awaking became thorough, and she started silently to creep away. But a second thought pinned her to the sofa. What was this dangerous Christina about? She must be watched; it was no moment for scruples.

"Thanks for the assurance," said the sweet voice, pensively. "Yes, I *am* sure that life would be quite

rose-colored for me if it depended on the will of so good a friend."

"That word again! You are determined to have it so — Well, name it as you choose; still, you *know*" —

"It is not a word to be despised," the first voice interrupted, with a faint accent of raillery. "It means a great deal. You ought to be perfectly satisfied with my application of it."

"Ought I? — One is so rarely satisfied when he ought to be!"

"That is very true. My friend is philosophical to-night. Does he *ever* expect to be satisfied?"

"No," replied the man's voice, after a pause. "I am afraid not. He will probably go on wishing, hoping, struggling; always thrust back, hemmed in, disappointed — What an outlook! Would you be sorry for him? No, you would not. I almost fancy you enjoying it. I wonder sometimes if you ever did care for any one. Must I believe" —

But the listener had heard all she wished to. She rose carefully, retreated without a sound to the farthest end of the room, and felt about for a match-safe. Finding it, she moved back with an audible step and lighted a pair of candles over the fireplace. She took one in her hand and carried it toward the window, letting its small ray fall on Christina in a low piazza-chair, and on Mr. Musgrove standing before her against the rail. His face looked pale and something tragic in the candlelight.

"Oh," said Betty, in her usual voice. "Good

evening, Mr. Musgrove. Won't you come in out of the damp? It *is* rather damp, you know, Christina."

Mr. Musgrove thanked her, and said he would not come in. He was on his way home when he overtook Mrs. Lecomte in the road, and was not intending to make a call just then. It *was* a trifle damp; he thought there would be rain. And then he bowed and said good-night, and jumped down into the dusk.

Christina gathered herself up and came through the long window, clapping its leaves together after her.

"Have you just come in, Betty?" she inquired, carelessly.

"No," said her sister, putting back the candle. "I came in some time ago."

"And have you been alone in our room ever since?" Christina kept on, looking curiously in her sister's face.

"No," said Betty, meeting the look gravely. "I have not been in our room at all. I stopped here to rest, and fell asleep on the sofa. I have been awake for some time now."

The older sister made no immediate remark on this, but took two or three short turns up and down, her lovely face settling into a very mutinous and disagreeable expression. "Eavesdropping," she said at last with acid disdain, over her shoulder, "is horridly poor form!"

Betty took no notice of the words. "You remem-

ber that evening when you first wore Mr. Musgrove's flowers in your belt, Christina, and when you gave them back to him? Do you remember what you said when I asked if it was what they call a flirtation?"

"No, really, I have n't any recollection of it," returned her sister, lightly pacing back and forth with a rather unsuccessful air of indifference.

"You said it was a very mild sort. And I think it was — compared with this."

The poor child had been thinking how she should frame her reproof to raise as little of a storm as possible. She was afraid — not of her sister, but of the excitement which any reproach seemed to rouse in her, and lately more than ever. But Christina gave her little time to arrange speeches.

"Well, I suppose you 're going to preach to me about it, are you? I don't care," she affirmed recklessly, throwing calmness to the winds and moving about like a graceful caged animal. "If I choose to amuse myself with Mr. Musgrove now and then, I don't see why I must be badgered and sermonized! It does n't hurt him; men don't mind those things. I must have *something* to take up my mind, or I shall be wild — indeed I shall! It 's bad enough being obliged to stagnate in this town, like a cloistered creature. You don't seem to have any consideration for me! I think I 've been very unfortunate, and ought to be allowed what little diversion comes in my way. It 's little enough, I 'm sure."

And so she went on, her voice rising childishly all the time, and quivering with excitement.

Betty was greatly troubled. She drew back from this little explosion, feeling a painful doubt come upon her whether her sister's mind could be in a natural state. She had had this doubt before, on certain occasions. But it was generally dispelled by the reflection that Christina had never, from her babyhood, been as other people are. Only it was something new for her to lose control of herself, as she often seemed to in these days. Decidedly her nervous system was weakened.

This view of the case disarmed Betty effectually. She went up to the passionate pacing figure and stayed it with the clasp of her arm. "Never mind now, Christina! You 'll think better of it by and by. Come upstairs and rest. I would n't have mamma see you so nervous."

But Christina shook off the arm and ran away from her without another word, up to her room.

Betty followed, with a lagging step; and paused on the way to lean her head against the stair-rail, and blur its polish with a few very bitter tears.

CHAPTER XIX.

HERN'S POND.

AFTER this incident, Christina seemed to lapse into a state of general dulness and harmlessness, like a reaction.

She took scarcely any notice of the rector when he called. Most of her time indoors was spent in brooding over the boxes of French novels which she had sent out to her every little while, from the city. Betty looked on these with growing doubtfulness; and wondered whether some of her sister's principles might not have been different if she had lived less between those red, and blue, and canary covers. Wise Betty! For her own part, she had not much acquaintance with the contents of the fascinating covers; but the few samples which she had tried and given up in disgust caused her to class them all together, blue, red, and yellow, under the comprehensive head of "smutty."

Mrs. Lecomte used to laugh at her comments upon them, and call her puritanic. It may be surmised that a little more of the puritanic element would have proved not a bad thing in Mrs. Lecomte's moral structure.

But now she read her high-colored literature in

silence, with a certain listlessness, as though it were almost getting to be a surfeit.

One day she spoke, indirectly, of Hector; it was the first time now in several months that she had done so. She was dressing for a drive with her mother and the Doctor, and stood languidly putting some last touches to her toilet, while Betty was taking a rare moment of idleness in her little rocker.

"I wonder what people would think if they knew," she suddenly observed in a thoughtful tone. "I wonder what people would say about me. Do you think, if they knew it all, they would be very hard upon me?"

Betty looked at her, perplexed. It was her nearest approach yet to self-accusation. The sister had not an answer ready.

Christina did not seem to expect an answer. "We have kept the secret very well, have n't we?" she added, with a tinge of complacency.

"Very well — fortunately."

"Yes, fortunately. I would like to have you make me a promise, Betty."

"I will — if I can?"

"Yes, you can. Don't ever — no matter who else may know it — don't ever tell it to Axel Brand!" She hesitated in saying it, and having said it, she took up her gloves and went out of the room without waiting for the promise.

"Why, that is of course! I shall never tell *any* one," said Betty after her as she went. "Tell Axel!" she exclaimed to herself, left alone. "Poor

Axel! Who knows if I shall ever see him again, to tell him anything? Will he ever come home now? But this is not his home any longer." And then she passed a very sad quarter of an hour in thinking over the changes that had taken place since his first flight into the world.

After that she put by her meditations and went over to the stone cottage, where there was always a welcome for her in every corner. Even the statues seemed to smile on her as she came in. She felt a little thrill of pleasure as often as she passed through that dim hall in which she used to play, and the faint aroma from the Doctor's smoking-room crept out and mixed with the fragrance of Mrs. Brand's house-flowers.

But these pleasant pilgrimages never interfered with the longer ones which she took upon herself so willingly. Her mild face was as much looked for in the village as the wrinkled one of Griffin, who drove the coach and brought the mails; and the sight of her rush-basket was even more welcome, to a good many eyes, than the sight of the rusty leather sack that rode up daily to Micajah's — the post-master's — by Griffin's side.

"Miss Betty," said Mrs. Ricker, who had been listening with great delight to her young visitor's reading from a city daily, "you know them new folks that's moved into the cottages over by Hern's Pond — them little bird-cages of Mr. Harrod's putting up? They say some of the folks is pretty mis'able off, too. Put me in mind of 'em,

what you read about that charity work down to the city. They 've come over from the next county, for the men to work on Mr. Harrod's lots. Well, I hear that one o' them cottages holds seven children, and the mother of 'em has just run away and left 'em all on their father's hands! Don't much wonder *at* her, myself! But I don't see how they 'll make out to get along."

"Poor things! Well, I must make inquiries, and learn if there is anything I can do to help them."

"Will you, Miss Betty? Now that 's just like you, to be sure."

"Yes, I will try and walk over there to-morrow. Mr. Harrod is going to take his wife to the city on the early train; and I promised Rose that I would come to see them off, and spend the morning with her. But after dinner there will be plenty of time to get over to Hern's Pond."

She was as good as her word. Christina still lay asleep as she left the room, hat in hand, for a hurried cup of coffee before going to join the Harrods. She looked back at her sister as she softly closed the door, and thought what a childish head it was, with its pretty copper-tinted hair tumbling and curling all over the pillow. There was an unhappy look about its mouth and drawn-up eyebrows that lingered long in Betty's mind.

"I shall be gone till afternoon, mamma," she said as she left the breakfast-room. "Good by. Christina is not awake yet."

A day with Rose Harrod was as much of a holi-

day for Betty as it used to be when they were little girls together. Now Rose had developed very much and gained a great deal of experience during a number of winters in the city, and made a most successful hostess. The morning flew away on wings while she kept Betty in her own rosebud of a room, amusing her with pretty trifles, and with bright sketches of the outside world as it had fallen to her share.

"We 're going to have an early dinner," said she; "and then, if you are still bent on going over to those troublesome creatures at Hern's Pond, I 'll have my phaeton out and drive you there."

But this Betty stoutly declined to allow. "If you drove me over you 'd insist upon waiting to bring me back; and I don't want my proceedings hampered by you and the pony and the phaeton. I 'm ever so much obliged, but I 'd better make my rounds on foot."

It was midway of the afternoon when she started on the road to Hern's Pond.

There was a couple of miles' walking before her; but that was a mere trifle for such active young feet, and the day was not uncomfortably warm. The road took her in a direction different from that of her usual walks. It was a pleasant road, running mainly through woodland, so that she went much of the time in the shade of the black oaks and hickories. The song of a wood-thrush rang faintly in the deep green arches. She loitered to pull out some of the wild clematis that enlaced the roadside

bushes, and wound it around her arm as she walked along.

Almost before she was aware of it the woodland had ceased, the road slanted downward, and great clearings appeared, in which she could see the excavations and the general upheaval of things caused by Mr. Harrod's workmen. None of these disturbing forces were in view, however; it looked as if they had all suddenly deserted their posts, leaving behind the tip-carts and horses, which stood about among the earth-heaps, idle and driverless.

While Betty wondered at this state of things on "the lots," a solitary man in overalls crossed her field of vision and passed out of sight, running. Then the road made a bend, and hid the clearings and that end of the pond which had been visible among its alders and cornel-bushes.

The first of the workmen's cottages was before her; a great many children's heads were discernible within, and it was evident that the door had been locked upon them for safety in the absence of their elders. Betty summoned the oldest one to the window, and learned by questioning that they were the identical seven whom Mrs. Ricker had mentioned. But it appeared that the runaway mother had only gone as far as the next township when she thought better of it and returned to her duties; and that she had locked up the troublesome seven while she went down the road "to see a neighbor."

Having relieved her humane anxiety, Betty strolled

on again, meaning to strike across by a path she knew of into the highway toward home.

As the cottages straggled one by one into sight, it seemed to her that something unusual must have occurred. The dwellings seemed mostly left to themselves; near one of them three or four women stood talking in a knot, very close together. At a little distance there was a group in blue overalls, also huddled together, but rather silent, and casting helpless and curious glances toward the women; further down the roadside was another group in overalls; these were the men who should have been at work among the mounds and tip-carts.

As Betty came along toward them, one of the women separated from the knot and went to meet her. It was a stout, kind-looking young woman, with an expression of singular awe and solemnity upon her face.

"Miss," said she, without waiting to be questioned, "miss, there 's been an accident!"

"An accident?" repeated Betty. "What is it? Is one of the men hurt?"

"No, miss, none of the men. It is a woman. A young lady, miss, drowned in the pond. And being strangers hereabouts we don't none of us know who it is. When I caught sight of you up the road, miss, I says 'There 's a lady, and likely she 'll know, if it won't frighten her to come and look.'"

"Oh, poor creature! Are they sure she is really drowned? Has a doctor been sent for?"

"Oh yes, miss, we sent for a doctor, but it 's so far,

and he has n't got here yet. But it 's no use, miss — no use at all. The doctor can't do any good when he comes, only to tell us what to do about her — poor thing ! "

" When did it happen ? " Betty asked.

" After noon, miss. The men were having their dinners. It was my man brought her up from the pond." Here the young woman, who had been looking intently in Betty's face as she spoke, hesitated, changed color, and stopped short.

" Is it — is it in that cottage ? " asked Betty, pointing toward the cluster of whispering women.

" Yes — yes, miss, it is ; but had n't you — maybe you had n't ought to go in just now ! Don't you think " —

Betty walked slowly toward the cottage. The young woman followed her with an alarmed face, still talking. " You would n't think it, miss, to look at her ; but she — she did it herself ! "

" Did it herself ! " repeated Betty, mechanically.

What horrible idea was this !

" She did indeed, miss. Two of the men saw her. They were down under the trees taking a rest ; and they saw her come into that cove on the further side, and get in an old boat that was stranded up there, and then she pushed out for the middle of the pond with one oar. And she threw herself right over the edge, miss, and went down ! The men were after her as swift as you can think, and we 've all done everything that could be done ; but it 's been no use, miss — no use at all ! "

The other women were close behind; they all stopped in the little yard before the door. One of them was a small nervous woman who was crying all the time, and working her hands; the others were quieter, grave, and timorous-looking. Betty looked at the nervous one, and thought it might be the mother of the seven locked-up babies she had talked to. Then she crossed the threshold and leaned with her hand against the door-post, looking at the clematis which still wreathed her arm. Clematis was always from that day a flowering horror to her.

She stood in the doorway of a darkened room, its narrow limits lost in the obscurity. The outer light followed her in, and fell directly on a small bed, whose covering rose white over the outline of a silent mystery. She heard the nervous woman behind her whispering and crying — "Don't let her go in! she ought n't to be let go in!" The others stood watching in a hushed, anxious group.

A white butterfly flitted in past her, circled about a moment, and lost itself somewhere in the shadows. Betty's eye followed it dimly, a faint shiver running through her. One might have fancied it the psyche of that quiet image lying under its white covering.

"Don't come in yet," said Betty with an effort, motioning back the women. "I am not afraid."

It was not true, but she did not know what she was saying. The thrumming of her heart seemed to stifle her; a mortal fear had her in its grasp, even while she forced herself to go and stand close by this veiled immobility that was so harmless and yet so

full of awe. She closed her eyes and made a quick prayer — for something indefinite. And yet she felt more and more, every instant, that the strange, most unlikely thing which she feared was upon her, and that no prayer now was of any avail, except for pity. She put out her hand and drew back the sheet — and then she covered up her head with her arms and sank down silently on the floor; and sight and knowledge went away from her.

Yes, it was Christina, lying as she lay asleep in the morning; but with the soft hair clinging darkly around her childish head, and every trace of fear, or passion, or restlessness passed from the waxen face forever!

CHAPTER XX.

AT THE GAP.

AUNT BERTHA KARLSEN, as we remember, had one great affection beside that which was directed to herself — her affection for her elder niece. She was perhaps the one of all the family who suffered most severely from the shock of Christina's death. They managed to keep her ignorant of its sad details, and she shared the general impression, outside of Lyme, that it had been an accident.

She was very ill after it, so ill that Betty's mother felt obliged to shake off her own heaviness of grief, and go to watch over poor Aunt Bertha. Betty remained in charge at home, trying in vain to conquer, for her father's sake, the mortal loneliness and heart-sickness which dragged upon her.

"But for you and the Doctor, dear Mrs. Brand, I believe I should have died, too," she used to say afterwards to that faithful friend, whose ministrations were not only daily but almost hourly. They talked together a great deal, after their old custom; but Betty could not bring herself to speak much of her sister. It was a deep mystery to every one — what could have urged that poor, flighty little mind to such a desperate resolve! Betty alone was not to be left

long in wonder. Only the week after her sister's funeral, as she opened a box of handkerchiefs in her bureau, she found an envelope there, filled with Christina's light, fanciful handwriting, and marked with her own name. These were its contents:

"I was not sleeping when you looked at me. I was thinking over this letter, and where I should put it so that no one but you should find it. — Yesterday I walked out alone as far as the pond, and there was a boat on the shore. But I did not think about it then. When I was nearly at home again, a carriage passed along, and *he* looked out at me. His face was dreadful, and his eyes glared, but he drove on. You see he has not kept his word to you, and he is still here. I ran till I was inside the house and had the door fastened. If you had been there I should have told you; but before you came I remembered the boat and the pond, and my mind was made up. It is not worth while for me to live. I cannot be happy myself, nor make any one else so. I am going back to the pond this morning. You would say there was no danger, because I was not brave enough to take my own life. You did not understand me; nobody ever did. I suppose they will say my head was not right. It has sometimes seemed so to me, but I believe I was always unlike other people. You have been very good, though you cannot save me from *him*. I think you were sorry for me, and no one else ever thought I needed it. Good-by. Remember your promise never to tell any one!

C."

Betty read this letter trembling; cried bitterly over it, and burned it at the flame of a candle.

The rambling lines added conviction to the feeling she had often had, that her sister's mind had been disordered — perhaps slightly affected even from her girlhood. It seemed improbable that Hector should really have remained in the neighborhood, contrary to his promise; though if he had done so, it would be not unlike him to have appeared in just such a manner as his wife had shrinkingly recorded. But, in all likelihood, the "glaring eyes" from which she fled with such terror were lent by a roused conscience and unsteady brain to the face of some harmless traveller who may have been driving that day upon the Lyme highroad. This solution Betty was inclined to accept, as no one, then or afterwards, reported the passage of any foreign-looking stranger through Lyme village.

Mrs. Karlsen stayed into autumn with Aunt Bertha, coming home now and then for a look at household affairs. In November she came home "for good," with reassuring accounts of Aunt Bertha's condition.

"I am thankful to get you back, mamma," said Betty, following her about the house like a child. "Mrs. Brand has been a perfect guardian angel, but she is not very strong this autumn. I am sure the Doctor is worried about her, and it troubles me. She will not admit that she does not feel well. But you 'll see that she is looking more frail than usual, and I have an idea that her heart is not right."

"We must look after her," said Mrs. Karlsen, speaking cheerfully, as she now always made a point of doing. "I have just left one invalid, and do I come home to find another? That must be mended. Aunt Bertha is improving — oh, yes, very fast; but you have no idea how much she has been weakened, mentally and physically. At first she used to talk about Christina, and call for her, till I was nearly heartbroken. It was not delirium; she simply refused to believe that the child was not here, and could not come to her. Now she never speaks of her at all. But she asks a great deal about you, and made me promise that I would send you to her in the spring for a long stay — perhaps to go away with her for the summer."

"We 'll see, mamma. At present I want to stay with you. I 'm very glad she did not wish me to come to her just yet."

It was true that the Doctor was uneasy about his wife; still not a word would he say to that effect, and their friends only recognized it by a slight, indefinable shade upon his usual joyous manner. Axel discovered in some way that his mother was taking prescriptions; became frightened, and wanted to throw up his position and come home at once. But Mrs. Brand discouraged this plan, chiefly because Axel had just apprized them of new prospects for him — involving an official trip to a certain distant Court — which would take him out of England for a year or so. She wrote him that she was very well, and forbade him to think of returning be-

fore he was quite ready — when of course he would find such a welcome as words were not equal to describing. But if he could have seen her face while she read his letter with the first eager proposition, it is likely that the next steamer would have brought him to America, and that a Certain Distant Court would never have known his services.

The Doctor was on good terms with his son at present. He was still sore on the subject of the daughter-in-law, though not openly displeased; it was out of his power to remain long in hostility to any one. But those fine dark eyes of his often rested on his "Northern lily," and followed her slight figure to and fro, with a look whose fondness lost itself in deepest disappointment. "Oh, my boy," he sometimes lamented in his secret heart, "my foolish boy, if I only had not let you away from us so soon!"

In spring Betty fulfilled her mother's promise by going to Aunt Bertha.

She found the latter convalescent, but greatly changed. The light curls which Betty remembered still shaded her aunt's thin cheeks; but her favorite laces and jewels were all laid aside, and instead she wore a small cap and heavily-craped black gowns. There were many wrinkles in her face; the faint rose-leaf pink was all gone from it. Aunt Bertha looked old and faded, and cared not now to hide it.

She brightened considerably in Betty's presence, showing her much gentleness and affection.

"And you really feel entirely well and strong, my

dear?" she inquired, wistfully eying the flaxen head, and the black garments which made Betty look slenderer than ever. "It will be such a comfort to have you with me, after *months* of nobody but Willetts and the doctor and the maids! They are all reliable, but so tedious. And I shall be thankful to have you in the summer, when we leave town! I have been making plans for the summer, though of course for the very quietest kind of one. We must go where I can be very quiet, for I am a nervous old creature since my illness. I have been undecided between the Gap and the Susquehanna somewhere in Wyoming. Either will be pleasant, and not too far. Now, what do you think of the Gap, my dear? I am very fond of the Gap; and if you have never been there we certainly must consider it."

Aunt Bertha seemed to get back something of her old vivacity in talking over her summer arrangements. A good deal of it, perhaps, was forced, on Betty's account; each of the two made her best endeavors to be cheerful, for the other's sake.

"The Gap"—by which of course Aunt Bertha meant the Delaware Water Gap—was the place finally selected for their summering; and there they went as soon as the season had opened. There also shortly appeared a young man from Lyme, Mr. Jack Leavitt, in all the glory of his prospective riches and a beautifully matched pair of chestnuts. He had never wavered from his ideal since the days when he used to lean on Betty's piano and put her out of countenance with his devout gaze. In the first of

the family affliction he kept respectfully away, and tried to content himself by sending hot-house tributes to the damsel of his dreams. When he heard of her at "the Gap" with her Aunt Bertha, he felt that his time had come, and wrote for rooms with hot precipitation.

Aunt Bertha, who had never heard of him before, was quite moved by the attentions which he proceeded to offer them. When she took her little walk on the hotel-piazza, leaning upon her niece's arm,— she was quite feeble yet, and quickly tired,— Mr. Leavitt was promptly at hand, with rugs and folding-chairs. His chestnuts, they were notified, stood at their disposal; Aunt Bertha accepted more than one drive behind them, with Betty beside her, and Jack Leavitt holding the reins.

The guests at the hotel thought it a very interesting affair, and talked the little party over with great diligence. The invalid lady was distinguished-looking, and must have been rather handsome once; her pale young companion in black was a very noticeable figure, and, as they all said, "so extremely lovely." The young man was pronounced unbearably exclusive, being "so utterly absorbed" in the society of the two ladies. Jack had come to the Gap, of course, for them and nobody else; and was not going to waste one minute of his time on any other lady.

"Why did I never hear about him before, my dear?" demanded Aunt Bertha, over a magnificent flower-piece that he had ordered for them from the nearest glass-houses. "You keep your romances to

yourself, I see. But you really might have told me something of this one — such an amiable fellow, and so very nice-looking! Yes, I do consider him a handsome young man, Betty."

Jack Leavitt was a handsome young man, though with a wild and darkling eye, which perhaps might be attributed to the state of mind which he had so long endured. Unfortunately, Betty could never see him without a repugnant quiver, as she recalled the various little tilts between herself and Christina, of which he had been the subject.

Aunt Bertha's evident fancy for him made it all the worse. Neither sorrow nor sickness could destroy that lady's love of the romantic; and match-making was still, as ever, her dear delight. So Mr. Jack Leavitt's innocent manœuvres to get Betty away with him for walks and drives were well seconded by her gratified aunt.

"But she is so shy, or something!" exclaimed the troubled suitor to himself. "Hang me if I don't have the horses run away with us some day, so I can stop them at the risk of my life! Perhaps that might make her feel a little better acquainted with me. If I could n't stop them it would be awkward, to be sure. I don't know how I 'd do it, exactly; but anyhow we should all go to wreck together."

Before trying this supreme expedient Mr. Leavitt concluded to make one more attempt at a lonely promenade with his idol; and as they all sat upon the piazza in the afternoon he boldly suggested "a walk to the Falls."

Betty hardly liked to leave her aunt, who had had a severe headache most of the day.

"Nonsense, my dear! I shall do very well with Willetts for a while," said that lady. "You ought to see Caldeno Falls on a pleasant day; you have only seen it once, and the day was dull. Go for your hat, there 's a good child!"

"But I don't want to walk to Caldeno Falls, aunty. It 's too far, and I 'm tired."

"Well, then," urged Jack, "why not come to the hill out here, and look at the view? — it 's worth seeing toward sunset. You ought to walk once every day, you know."

Betty could make up no reasonable excuse to this; and by and by they walked off to mount the hill, followed by the beaming approval of Willetts and Aunt Bertha.

Jack was beaming also, but apprehensive. His speech failed him on the way up, though it was not a very steep ascent; and as his companion had nothing particular to say, it was an unsocial climb. Only when they stood at the top and looked toward the beautiful Shawnee hills, and the Delaware spreading smoothly far below, Betty spoke out unconsciously to herself in admiration.

"Yes," said Jack, drawing nearer, "*is n't* it fine? Did n't I tell you it was worth looking at?"

Poor Jack! before he made his descent the outlines of the Shawnee hills had lost their beauty, and the sunset clouds their charm. The Water Gap was to be thereafter but a rift which had swallowed up

his hopes; its memory haunted by a cruel shade whose yellow head must always shake an implacable refusal.

Half an hour later Betty came walking back to the hotel, alone.

"My *dear!*" exclaimed her aunt, reproachfully.

"Well, aunty, then why did you make me go to walk when I did n't want to? I feel better now, though. There 's just one thing I 'm rather sorry for — you won't probably have the chestnuts to drive after any more!"

Aunt Bertha looked as if she would like to read her niece a little sermon on "lost opportunities;" but she only sighed and closed her lips. Perhaps she had had her secret misgivings about a sometime match of her own making.

"Let 's go away from here, aunty," was Betty's next remark.

"Go away? What for? And where should you like us to go, pray?"

"Why, we could make a change easily enough. There 's a house — a very good house, they say — at Stroudsburg."

"A house," repeated her aunt, "at Stroudsburg! Yes, my dear, I have no doubt there is; and probably there are good barns at Stroudsburg, and good stables. I don't know what it can matter to us, in any case. Propose going back to the city, my dear, or any other inconceivable arrangement; but don't allude seriously to a house at Stroudsburg! Of course Mr. Leavitt will not remain here after this, we understand."

"Oh, I know that," said the young lady, promptly. "But I am sick of the place now, aunty, and it 's all owing to him. I shall never take another walk here without seeing his great eyes staring at me around every turn of the road!"

Nevertheless they did not leave the Gap until the date originally fixed. Betty realized that her aunt's delicate requirements could not be so well met at the smaller houses in Stroudsburg, or any other neighboring place, as at their present quarters; and after Jack Leavitt was gone — he went next morning — she did not mind it so much. It was a welcome day to her, however, when Willetts preceded them to the city to have the house in order for their coming; and a more welcome one when the Minisink with all its beauties dropped from sight behind their flying railway train.

"Aunt Bertha, I am so grateful for your kindness; and indeed I should be glad to stay on a little longer with you but for the people at home. You know how eager poor mamma has been for the summer to be over."

So Betty made no delay in her departure for Lyme. "Oh, sweet old place!" she said, looking out upon it as the old stage-coach took her and her mother through its quiet lanes toward their home. "How I do love you! Mamma, I was not made to be a traveller. Old Lyme is such a dear, picturesque, stupid village! Let us come home, mamma, and be stupid together."

It was very soon after her arrival that she heard a

bit of news which was still serving its time with all the gossips in the county, and considerably beyond. It concerned the Reverend Roderic Musgrove, and the fashion of it was this:

Two individuals had made their appearance in Lyme village; a very genial pair, and very mysterious. It was found — afterwards — that they carried a requisition for the person of somebody in the village — to wit, a young clergyman of the Church of England, James Crafts by name, in behalf of his wife, Mariana Crafts, and of certain other "parties" desiring the gentleman's address for reasons of pecuniary importance to themselves. But lo, when they almost had their hand, as it were, upon the gentleman they sought — he was elsewhere! He had taken his dog, his violin, his fishing-tackle and his liberal doctrines, and quietly departed. Or, in the simple language of the sheriff — "skipped."

And then it went forth among the villagers that St. Agatha's had lost her rector, and that James Crafts and the Reverend Roderic Musgrove were one and the same man!

CHAPTER XXI.

A LITTLE ADVENTURE.

"AND what does Mr. Goodwillie say to it, mamma?" was among Betty's first questions, as she took in the full enormity of the Crafts-Musgrove affair.

"Mr. Goodwillie, my dear, takes it as much to heart as if that wretched man had always been his friend. He grieves over it bitterly; and yet you know how cool and patronizing Mr. Musgrove used to be with him. He has the charity of a saint, I certainly believe."

"One begins to think," said her daughter, laughing, "that Mrs. Ricker's opinion of him is none too high, and that we really have a 'sperit of light' walking among us in Mr. Goodwillie's old black coat!"

The Crafts scandal was indeed a terrible shock to the good Baptist pastor. It mattered nothing to him whether the actor in it were friend or foe, Ritualist or Baptist; he had worn the cloth, and his misdeeds were a blot upon the common scutcheon of the church.

"'*That the ministry be not blamed,*'" was Mr. Goodwillie's great solicitude. Even the small innovations,

the harmless-seeming amusements, which Mr. Crafts-Musgrove had carried along into his clerical life, had seemed ill-advised to his brother minister, as taking away, in some degree, from the dignity and sanctity of the calling. How unspeakably awful, then, in his eyes, was the fall of this "fallen angel" from St. Agatha's pulpit!

"'Giving no offence in *any*thing, that the ministry be not blamed!'" repeated Mr. Goodwillie to himself, warningly.

He had made himself a little axiom, too: "On the blameless man blame never rests" — and these two sayings he had mentally framed and hung up for his own contemplation. It will be seen that this country clergyman's piety was strict and uncompromising; and there are not very many in our day who would quite coincide with all his views.

But I believe that no minister of Mr. Goodwillie's type was ever found unfaithful to his charge.

The Reverend Roderic, while observing all the forms of politeness, had no doubt kept a very lofty attitude toward the other clergyman. He considered him narrow, mediocre, unpolished — all of which, in the Musgrovian sense, the other truly was. Yet there were heights and depths in that narrow character which were beyond James Crafts' perception.

The younger man, who was rather inclined to parade himself as a "muscular Christian," and admired his own physical culture very much indeed, hardly concealed his sense of superiority over a man who had never been to Oxford, and knew nothing, as

you might say, of vaulting, or sparring, or fencing. But for the untimely arrival of those two gentlemen from the city, the "muscular Christian" would have heard a little story which made the second sensation in Lyme that winter, and showed that Mr. Goodwillie was at least very far from being a flabby Christian!

Rose Harrod was going to the city for the opening of the new year.

It was morning — a sharp winter morning, when she entered the train alone and chose her seat. There was but a handful of passengers: a half-grown boy or two, an old woman with carpet-bags, some children, and two or three schoolgirls. And, as Rose settled in her corner and pulled her pretty white furs up around her ears, Mr. Goodwillie's tall figure passed with a bow, took a seat beyond, across the aisle, and unfolded a newspaper. He was on his way to supply a pulpit just outside of the city.

Rose knew Mr. Goodwillie, of course, as everybody knew everybody else in Lyme; but the acquaintance was slight, and a pretty High Church girl would not be apt to take much interest in an old-fashioned "Freewiller." She let her eye rest on him, twinkling and half indifferent; was a little touched by the inadequacy of his overcoat, and amused at the red woolen wristlets that boldly supported his newspaper. Then she snuggled her chin deeper into the furry warmth of her white collar, shut her eyes, and forgot all about him.

Half-way to their destination, the train was boarded by three men, palpably of the lower order. One of them was a large man, of a "flash" or sporting appearance; the other two looked like workingmen. The rush of cold air which they brought into the car was unpleasantly flavored with bad tobacco, tavern cookery, and a great deal too much of the cheap fluid invigorators which are sometimes found in taverns. This interesting party were in the frame of mind which prompts to the assertion of independence; and they talked and laughed very freely as they jostled through the aisle. Having turned over a seat with a bang, to Rose's horror they took possession of the places directly in front of her.

Now if there was anything fatal to this young lady's firmness, it was an intoxicated man; and three of them in such near neighborhood was more than she could endure. Mr. Goodwillie, looking around from his paper, saw a pair of brown eyes, rounded with dismay, glance toward him anxiously under Miss Harrod's hat-brim. She waited a moment, and then, hoping they would not notice her, slipped quietly into the seat behind, which was the last on that side. But the large man, unhappily, was in just the mood to notice everything that was done, and take it as a particular offence to himself. He looked over his shoulder suspiciously; cast a wink at his companions, and rising with great ostentation stretched himself in the place just vacated by Rose. Then, to remove all doubt of his perfect equality with everybody present, he produced a smouldering pipe

and calmly blew a whiff of smoke into the close air of the car.

Rose had never expected to feel such an interest in Mr. Goodwillie as she did at this moment. He had folded his newspaper across the back of the seat, and was sitting with his face toward the three independents. As the first puff of smoke arose, Mr. Goodwillie did the same. Rose thought that he looked uncommonly tall, and that she had never seen his eyes so black.

"My friend," said he mildly, moving across the aisle, "this is not a smoking-car, and there are ladies here."

"Oh," returned the pipe's owner somewhat thickly, with a facetious wave of the hand, "nev' mind! Thaddont make any diffrence. Jussoon smoke here as anywhere; no objection to ladies! Tain't your fault if there 's no smoker on this train, you know. Don't 'pologize," and another puff whirled toward Rose's frightened face.

"I think, sir, you have n't understood me," said the minister, softly; and as he spoke he seemed to expand in a singular manner. "Either that pipe or you, sir, will go out within two minutes."

The smoker rolled up his eyes and surveyed Mr. Goodwillie with glassy scepticism. "You be hanged!" said he, and lowered them contemptuously.

"Don't you be crowed over, Bob!" put in one of the other roughs. "He 's no good. You 're better 'n he is. Don't you see he 's nothin' but a *preacher?*"

"You 're right, my man, I preach," returned Mr. Goodwillie; "and it may be well for you to note that I 'm not quite out of practice, either." And in the flash of a red wrister the pipe was twitched from "Bob's" astonished mouth, and went flying through a window which Mr. Goodwillie opened for the purpose.

It was tinder to flint. The sporting-man was on his feet in an instant, pouring out a flood of sputtering wrath; he was behind Mr. Goodwillie as the window closed, striking at him wildly and swearing most fluently. But before he knew it, the unlucky Bob was pounced upon by the clergyman, shaken, twisted, held up by the neck, and finally shot into the end of the car with such force that the glass flew out.

The other passengers were huddled into corners, some screaming and some petrified into silence. Rose stood up straight, as white as her furs, clutching the back of a seat with her little gloves. The affair was not settled yet. "Bob's" comrades, seeing their friend's treatment, had sprung up to attack the preacher, adding their share to the profanity already floating about. Bob now returned to the charge, raging worse than ever, and bringing a great stick which he had found in the passage.

What happened then happened so fast that nobody in the car could have recounted it. The children howled at the top of their voices. Rose saw a struggling group of men, with one tall figure whose head was bleeding freely from the blows of the

sporting-man's stick. She sprang upon a seat, caught the bell-cord and dragged at it frantically.

Two of the roughs were seen to topple over, one after the other. "Great Powers!" panted the third, reeling back out of the way, "what sort of a preacher is this?"

The conductor, a small, birdlike man, burst open the door, followed by two or three train-hands. "Gentlemen! gentlemen!" he called out, appealingly, waving his arms.

The train slackened, grated and stopped.

As the last of the independents made a bolt for the outer air, Mr. Goodwillie, putting his hand to his head, quietly sat down and fainted away.

CHAPTER XXII.

PERILOUS SPORTING GROUND.

NOT one, perhaps, of the people who had known the Reverend Musgrove during his Lyme rectorate thought of looking at his "affair" at all in a tragic light. Those outside the Church were disposed to chuckle and joke over his undignified exit; the religious townsmen frowned grimly and unappeasably on the whole subject. Yet there was something pitiable — if they had but thought of it — in that picture of a hunted rogue, stealing away by night from the menace of prison-gates, past houses where he had been so often a welcome guest, past the chapel whose altar he had dishonored, beyond the limits of the village where his show of manhood and purity had so prospered that he had almost forgotten any doubtful past — now all lost to him, forever and ever! He stopped once on a hill-road in his solitary flight, and looked back toward the dark indistinguishable town with its few chance lights.

They might have pitied him if they had seen him then. Yet he had shaped his own fortunes.

When day broke he was far away. His pursuers were not acquainted with his resources; moreover they had counted too much on the security which

his long and respectable stay in Lyme should have given him. A "professional" could not have taken alarm more promptly, nor covered his tracks more adroitly. He had pride enough still to feel a certain contempt of himself for being able to do it so well.

"I have all the qualifications for a first-class criminal," said he to himself, as he issued at the next night-fall from a costumer's shop in the first city he had reached. He had in his pocket a little package containing a reddish moustache, a bottle of dye warranted to redden the darkest hair in a week, and some colored pencils for getting up the face — "for private theatricals." He had also been in a "tonsorial saloon" and had his hair cropped as short as possible. When he left the train again by daylight in New York, his father the Dean — had that good man still existed — would not have recognised him. Even the style of his collar and tie was altered. He presented a very American appearance; and carried in straps a heavy shawl and extra coats, such as would be needed by a traveller about to cross the ocean. For that was what he had decided on as his safest course. He was wanted in England; England therefore was the last place where they would expect him to go. So England was his immediate destination, and he meant to get there as fast as possible. He knew there was an outward-bound steamer about to start; till that time, certainly, he was safe, for he had left a false scent behind him, and they were already making off at

full speed in the opposite direction. Though for that matter he might safely have stayed or gone where he would in his present disguise. His dog and fishing-tackle had been disposed of at different points in his hasty transit; he was no longer Roderic Musgrove — though for convenience's sake we may still call him so.

But in spite of his neat escape from the terrors of the law, a more unhappy man rarely paces the deck of an ocean steamer. What a chance for self-communion had he in those long watches of the night, when the stars glimmered on him and the waters rushed away fleetly behind him! In the daytime, too, he kept by himself: it was more prudent; yet he had reached that state of recklessness which finds its only pleasure in risks. He made no attempt to hide away from the other passengers, but he feigned an affection of the throat, which required the wearing of his travelling-shawl closely muffled over his chin, and prevented conversation. Behind this shield he used to scan his fellow-voyagers from his solitary post on deck. There was one young girl who had hair like Christina's. He watched it haggardly when the sea-wind twitched it from under her veil and sent its tawny rings flying over her sunburned cheeks. So much as it was in his power to care for any one beside himself he had cared for Christina. Her death, and the manner of it, had been a fearful shock to him. People generally had observed this, and sympathized with him. The claim of the faded Mariana in England — which

of course they knew nothing of then — "taking in sewing" for her living, with not so much probably as a moated grange to mortgage, weighed with feather-lightness on the conscience of Mr. Crafts-Musgrove. He might have forgotten all about such a person in time, but for that requisition.

Christina's death had even affected his health, people said. The fact was, that it had so wrought upon him, and caused him such dreams and such troubled nights, that he took to using a drug for sleeplessness; and after a while used it by day, and quite frequently, for its deadening effect upon the nerves. He had a flask of it in his pocket now, as he walked the deck pondering his possible future.

How he was to support himself in that future was not yet clear to him. "I can live by my wits, at any rate," he meditated. "They ought to carry me through."

But in spite of this comforting prospect, he suffered bitterly from his enforced solitude. He had a distinctly social nature; it was a martyrdom to be in sight of gay intercourse, such as this around him, and yet cut off from sharing it. And it was bitterest of all to acknowledge — as he now did in his lonely reflections — that there was no man on sea or shore that he could call his friend. There was Axel Brand, to be sure, who had not yet heard of his disgrace. He always liked Axel, and even had a certain admiration for him as a bright, graceful, many-sided fellow whose gifts stood out in effective relief from the rustic background of Lyme. He thought that

Axel liked him, too; there were so many points on which they were in sympathy, and Axel was so amiable and put such a fair valuation on the refinements of others. How the fugitive longed for one of those good-humored hand-shakes; for the merry tilts of wit in which they used to indulge, and the delightful lazy hours in his study with Jack and the Stradivarius. The thought of Axel gave rise to many other thoughts. If he could see him before the Lyme people had time to give their version of the story, Musgrove could enlist his sympathy — Brand was always so kind-hearted! — and pave the way to something — to something — there again his calculations wandered. He would be frank with Axel; that was the best way to take him; and Axel was a citizen of the world, and would be more tolerant than those old fogies in Lyme. And then he wished so passionately for another hour of equality and fellowship with somebody who filled his idea of a gentleman; who understood the subtleties of social culture; and whose clothing — London made — breathed the fine aroma of the elect. There were no indications that the Reverend Roderic Musgrove would ever descend to fraternize with common sharpers.

When the steamer touched dock in Liverpool his campaign was planned. Axel Brand had become the end and object of his journey. He had his address — city, street, and number — in his pocketbook, and found his way to it without delay. Axel was not there — gone for a month to Copenhagen, his wife's

native city. They would be staying with Max Lindholm, senior, in such-and-such a "Gade."

On went Musgrove, pocketing the new address; hurrying through the rough trip to Copenhagen with as few breaks as possible. At the Lindholms' house he interviewed a fair, thin and gaily-robed lady who introduced herself as Mrs. Brand, and regretted *so* much — with a slight accent marring her neat English — that her husband was at present making a little tour in the Jutland mountains; to the Himmelbjerg, the beautiful peak, where he used to go as a student. He so enjoyed renewing the early associations!

Her father and brother appeared; and among them they detained Musgrove overnight, and made much of him till he began once more to feel himself a social ornament.

With the morning he pushed on eagerly toward the Himmelbjerg, his desire to find Axel only intensified by its difficulty of attainment. At a public-house in the little paper-manufacturing town which is headquarters for the lake visitors, his chase finally drew toward its close.

Yes, the Herr Brand was staying there for a short time. He was out for the day, however; had gone after plover on the moor, all alone — singular fancy! — but he had often been here before, and knew the ground well. Risky business, though, this hopping about in the *mose* with firearms! If one should get shot by mistake, or miss footing and slip into the bog, with nobody near to help — the landlord expressively shrugged. Would the respected gentle-

man wait here till night? or would he like to take a boat and go down stream on his friend's track? The fishing was good, and he might come upon the Herr Brand somewhere.

"He is very hard to come at," said the respected gentleman, with a tired smile. "I have been hunting him all the way from London; and I am just over from America."

The landlord gazed at him in deep and innocent admiration.

"My journey has rather fagged me; still, you can give me something to remedy that; and I shall be very glad afterward to take a boat and explore some of your beautiful scenery."

This suggestion was acted upon promptly, but Musgrove's appetite was faint, after all. His nerves were asserting themselves under the long strain of fatigue; he took a dose of his inseparable drug before going out to the river. The landlord accompanied him, and gave him many warnings about "getting bogged," or attempting to cross a "*mose*" if he should land anywhere. Musgrove's heavy spirits began to rise as he pushed off alone. It was a pleasant sensation to be going about in this strange country where he was so wholly unknown and safe; where any slight physical risks only added to the stimulus of the bracing air. What a fine country this would be to live in! Why not? Perhaps Axel could help him to something here; perhaps he might make himself a foothold once more, and get back into those walks in life where a clever fellow ought to be. He

pulled hopefully at his oars — a good Oxford stroke. From lakelet to lakelet, lying across the main stream; in guidebook phrase, "like a string of jewels on a silver thread."

There leaped a fish — what a fish! Musgrove wished he had brought along fishing-tackle, as the landlord advised. Something plunged from the bank; possibly an otter. How excited his little terrier Jack would have been at the splash! He had lamented bitterly the need of separating from Jack. A man may be a scapegrace, and yet be very kindly affectioned to his dog.

A mountain loomed up on his left, with a score of little mountains around. This must be the Himmelbjerg — "heaven-mountain" — it was nearer the heavens than anything he had yet seen; a stately height, wrapped in a beautiful misty mantle of gold and amethyst — heather and broom. It was as though light were falling on it through the colors of stained glass; yellow and violet — like, for instance, the windows in St. Agatha's chapel.

He pulled on steadily, frightening the shy waterfowl with the clip of his oars. By and by a boat appeared, moored at a little landing-place. He rowed up to it on the chance of its being Axel's boat; fastened his own beside it, and scrambled ashore through the sweet heather. The landlord had told him of a roadside inn on one of these lakelets; after a time he found such a place, and its proprietor dreaming pleasantly in the doorway. Musgrove managed to establish an understanding with this native, whose patois somewhat resembled English.

Yes, a gentleman had stopped there an hour ago. Tall gentleman, with gun; going to shoot in the *mose*. Bad place, the *mose*, for strangers. But many birds. It lies there, quite near — and the native pointed, obligingly.

Musgrove started on again patiently toward the moor. It was, as the native said, quite near. Its black expanse very soon spread before him, dotted with little turf-mounds. The golden spurs of the bog-lily — iris — pricked up here and there through the dark ooze. Musgrove stood wonderingly; it was his first sight of a ground like this.

Ah, there was his man! Almost in speaking-distance; a brown figure of a sportsman, in short coat and long gaiters; crouching on one of the turf-hillocks, with his gun brought to his shoulder. It was surely Axel, though his face was out of sight. Birds or no birds, Musgrove was too eager to wait till that gun was discharged. He gave a loud quick whistle, and began to jump from mound to mound into the *mose*. The sportsman dropped his gun and stood up with a gesture of annoyance.

"Brand! Brand! how are you?" shouted the ex-rector, forgetting his changed aspect for the moment.

Axel surveyed him sharply, holding his gun, as if he were a new kind of game. Then he shouted back, emphatically, "Hold on there, whoever you are! This is bad footing. You'll be swamped next! Stay where you are till I come to you!"

"Don't you know me, old fellow? Don't you know

Roderic Musgrove?" called the ex-rector, obediently halting.

Axel reached him with a series of careful jumps, and stared at him without touching his extended hand. "My good sir," said he, suspiciously, after a pause, "you may be Roderic Musgrove, and I won't contradict you; but you 're no Roderic Musgrove of my acquaintance, that 's positive! What 's the next move, now?"

"Why, Brand, my dear boy! Come here and look me right in the eye," urged Musgrove, taking off his cap and smiling steadfastly in Axel's face. "You 're armed, you know, and I 'm not," he added, laughing rather awkwardly; "so you can pick me off like a plover if I don't stand the test. Is n't this Musgrove's eye, now? Are n't these his shoulders? I would jump a fence for you, if there was anything of the sort about; but I 've shown you a little of my spring already in getting on this confounded thing they call a 'mose!'"

"Well, upon my word," said Axel slowly, still staring as he reached out his hand, "that does sound like Musgrove! And that looks like his eye — and you 're certainly built like him. But — where the dickens did you get a red moustache? and — and — why, by Jupiter, your *hair* is red, too!"

"Well, never mind that now," said Musgrove, guiltily, tugging his cap again over the auburn crop. "A moustache does change the face immensely. *You* look odd enough, with that beard. I don't feel over-flattered at my reception, you know, Brand."

"Why, deuce take it, what 's to be expected when you come popping up in a Jutland bog, with a red moustache on you? I can't get over that, anyhow. You 're the Great Unexpected, with a vengeance! And you 're looking rather ill, too. How *did* you get here, Musgrove?"

"Oh, I 'm not staying in Lyme at present. I — I 've left America."

"I see you have. If you had only left it a trifle later I should n't have missed that last shot. Seriously, though, have you given up Lyme for good?"

"Lyme has given me up," said Musgrove, with an air of discomfited melancholy. "I suppose St. Agatha's has got somebody in my place by this time."

"You don't mean it! Musgrove, I implore you to explain that moustache, and that hair! You 've been doing something to it. And you 're so queerly gotten up, too. If you 'll excuse a marine term, the 'cut of your jib' is so awfully unclerical that it 's no wonder I did n't recognize you. You don't look exactly like a bagman, you know; but, by Jove, you *don't* look like a rector!"

"No, I never expect to look like one again," said Musgrove, uneasily stubbing his boot against the knob of black turf. "To cut it short, Brand — I 've got myself into trouble."

"Into trouble, eh?" echoed Axel, fixing a curious eye on him, and leaning with hands clasped around his gun. "What kind of trouble, now? 'Incompatibility of tenets,' as old Harrod used to say?"

"Oh no — nothing of that kind," said Musgrove, taking off his cap again and twirling it about like a schoolboy under embarrassment. "It began farther back than Lyme. Well, you shall have the whole story, Axel. That 's what I came here for. You are the only man under the heavens whom I would approach in this way; and you will hardly believe how much I have counted on it ever since I left America. To begin with — before I ever went there I had some rather bitter opposition in my parish, as perhaps you have heard."

"Hm!" said Axel, non-committally.

"Yes, we did n't get on at all. I might have stuck it out, but I began to lose my hold in consequence of ill-luck."

"Ah," observed Axel. "Of the nature of" ——

"Financial complications," said Musgrove. "Precisely. Yes, I ran in debt. Well, a man 's got to live, if he *is* a clergyman. And I 'll tell you, now, I do think a clever man has a better right to live than some others! What do you say?"

"Some men are too clever to live," suggested Axel.

"Right you are, dear boy. But I 'm not that kind. Just clever enough; — and I 'm nothing if not humble. Well, as I said, I had ill-luck; and there was a little misunderstanding about settlements — it is n't necessary to go into details" ——

"Not at all," said Axel.

"— In consequence of which I was obliged to sever my connection with the parish. I would have

done it more leisurely, and more harmoniously all round, if they had acted differently; but they did n't, and my wife "—

"*What?*" jerked out Axel.

"Yes, she 's another part of the trouble. I never was a greater fool than when I made that connection. She actually sided with my detractors in the parish! Why, sir, it 's my belief that the very proceedings which damaged my reputation and drove me from my refuge in Lyme were started at the instigation of Mrs. Crafts — my name was then Crafts, by the way."

"The deuce it was!"

"I found it prudent, in starting afresh, to take another name. I hoped and expected to keep it clear from detraction — but I have failed, owing to the persistency of my enemies. You can bear witness, Brand, that my life in Lyme was above reproach."

"Why, you — you scoundrel!" burst out Axel, thumping down his gun-stock into the soft soil. "Do you think I don't know how you dangled around that poor Christina? Don't I know that all the village thought you were paying court to her? What am I to call that, you confounded hypocrite?"

"Take care, Brand, you are in a passion," said Musgrove, growing white as the other grew red. "No harm was done there. She did not care for me — but I loved her, and she is dead."

"Let us speak no more of her," said Axel, in a quieter tone. "She is beyond your reach, for good

or ill. — I don't see that you justify yourself. What of the poor creature you ran away from in England?"

"She can take care of herself," said Musgrove, doggedly. "*She* has friends enough! You put things in a singularly offensive manner, Brand. I hoped to find an adviser in you; I may say I anticipated it, remembering the friendship we formed in your native village, and my old belief in your kindness of heart. Perhaps I have been counting too much upon you."

"I am afraid you have. What did you expect me to do for you, *Mr. Crafts?*" said Axel in a satirical voice.

"I expected you to give me a kind word, if nothing more. I did *not* expect you to thrust me off because I have been unfortunate and unwise. I wanted another chance for my reputation — a chance to work for it, in some strange country — perhaps here — where there would be no recognition to drag me down again. I might retrieve myself, in my own eyes at least. You could help me to it, if you would. I should never have come to you with my story if I had not trusted in that."

"I begin to understand the red moustache," said Axel, running him over with a sarcastic eye. "Also the commercial appearance. You thought me very warmly disposed toward you in our former acquaintance, it would seem?"

"Your mother," returned Musgrove, impressively, "always honored me with her kind friendship, as you know"—

"Don't take her name upon your lips!" said Axel, at white heat. "Nor that of any other who is dear to me, or I'll knock you into the *mose!* You 'counted on my friendship,' did you? You took me for a soft easy fellow, with no particular morals, and no standard of what a man in your calling ought to be! You thought your cleverness was going to stand you in stead of religion, did you? No, Musgrove, or Crafts, or whoever else you may be, — there is but one standard, and that you never so much as came in sight of! You never deceived me. Cleverness does n't outweigh uprightness, with me. I 'm a good-for-nothing fellow enough, Heaven knows; but I 'm not so despicable as that! If you were honestly sorry and ashamed of yourself, and came begging me to help you to a better way of living, do you think I would turn my back on you? But you 're not sorry — it is n't in you; and, by George, I shall hear of you at Monte Carlo one of these days; and I should n't wonder if you broke the banks and set yourself up for a nabob!"

Musgrove stood motionless under the invective, glowering silently from beneath his knitted eyebrows. Not a pleasant object for a vis-à-vis at short range. His white face had grown darker and darker till it was quite purple; his eyes had a wild, bleared look, perhaps the effect of long indulgence in that favorite drug of his. His breath came hard; he was dwelling on the downfall of the hopes which he had so pinned upon this interview. His pride burned within him at the scornful words he had

received; his veins all tingled with febrile fury and disappointment. The spirit of Axel's fine honesty, towering above his careless accustomed self like the Afrit released from the peasant's bottle, cowed his companion into intolerable abasement. He drew back and looked vengefully into the other's bright contemptuous eye, and muttered something that sounded like profanity.

"I think it is about time to end the interview, Mr. Crafts," said Axel, brushing his handkerchief across his forehead, and tilting back his head with insolent grace. "You will find the lake scenery very interesting as you return to the town."

Musgrove made a gurgling sound in his throat, and sprang over at him like a panther, his glazed eyes streaked with red.

Axel's gun slipped from his hand in the shock. He grasped his assailant, and strained with all his might to keep a footing on the little mound of turf. For one minute of desperation he thought his chance was small, and so it would have been if Musgrove had possessed his former power. But the man's drugged system refused to second his will; his first advantage was only a spasmodic effort of strength, and soon gave way in Axel's healthy grip. His clutching hands were torn away; down he rolled into the soft morass, grasping vainly at the yellow iris-heads that nodded over the treacherous slime.

A fall of Pride, indeed! The miserable creature struggled furiously, getting deeper and deeper as he struggled, and crying out to be helped. Axel, pale

and panting, and streaming with perspiration, knelt on the little foothold won at such hazard, and looked down at him. Contempt, indignation and triumph strove together in the young man's excited face.

"Help me out! Are you going to let me be swallowed up in this cursed mud-hole before your eyes?" gasped Musgrove.

The gun was resting as it fell, across the mound. Axel picked it up.

"Here, you villain, catch hold of that!" said he, reaching it out at arm's length. "Hold on tight, and I 'll pull you up; — and hang me if I ever wanted to do anything less!"

A moment of hard pulling accomplished it. Musgrove crawled up on the turf and sat there, drawing short, heavy breaths, and trying wretchedly to clear himself from the glutinous bog-mud. Axel jumped over nimbly to another hillock and took a survey of him. His boyish sense of the comic suddenly triumphed over the consciousness of his narrow escape. "I 've done my duty by you," said he, "and I don't know but I 've done more than my duty, considering that you wanted to assassinate me. I hope I 'm charitable enough to wish you would turn over a new leaf! Good-by, Mr. Crafts. Don't trouble yourself to rise" — and the young man, shouldering his gun, went springing away to firmer ground.

He had the curiosity, before re-entering his inn, to climb to a higher point which overlooked the moor. A sluggish figure was moving slowly and aimlessly

on its rough surface, as though careless of any destination. Axel saw it stop midway, take something from its pocket, and go through the motion of drinking.

"What they call an 'eye-opener,'" murmured Axel, "in that section where Mr. Crafts is sure to turn up by and by! Ah, the consummate scamp! How he used to like old port, though! — Too much 'eye-opener,'" soliloquized the young man, as he descended to the inn, "is not good in crossing a *mose*."

Axel's conjecture was wrong; it was the old drug — the perfidious friend — that Musgrove was putting to his lips for stimulus, with a hand all unnerved and fluttering.

It was the last sight that Axel ever had of the fallen clergyman. Whether he finally found his way to Monte Carlo, as the young man predicted, and burned out his candle in the flame of that fascinating Hades; or whether the black and deadly *mose* held his fate, is an unanswered question. One thing only is certain — that neither James Crafts nor Roderic Musgrove has ever been heard from since that day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE STONE COTTAGE IS DESERTED.

THE shadow that had hovered so long about the Brands' cottage settled there at last. The gentle confidante who held the key to Betty's shyest of hearts had looked into its harmless secrets — not, perhaps, for the last time, but for the last time, at least, with the imperfect fondness of mortality. The end was sudden. She stood one spring night with Betty on the garden-walk, and held her hands as they had their frequent little good-night chat.

"I feel so well this evening, my dear child!" she said brightly. "Do you know, I *have* had some of the dullest feelings — I fancied them presentiments, that I was not to see my boy any more. I did not speak of them at the time, because it seemed so foolish, when I was not ill. But now I feel so very well and cheerful that you may laugh at me for such nervous notions, my love!"

By morning the shadow had fallen; and Betty knew that in truth the brown eyes would never shine upon their well-beloved any more.

It was a sad, bewildered season through which they had to pass. The Karlsen family, not yet recovered from the shock of their own loss, entered the

more fully into their friend's grief. If Axel could have been with him, they said, it would have been so much better for both. But Axel was far away; many a day's journey stretched between him and his lonely father.

John Karlsen went at once and took his post at the Doctor's side, ready to do what little he could to comfort him. Mrs. Karlsen could do more, in a practical way, by taking the household into her hands, and directing the distressed servants, who had been fondly attached to their mistress.

Betty went back and forth noiselessly between the two houses, finding a little relief for her heart-ache in steady occupation. The blow was a heavy one to her. Not only had she lost the dearest, most sympathetic of friends, but it seemed to her at first that a link had also been broken between herself and Axel. Still, holding by her fantastic child's-faith of old, she was assured that Destiny still guarded the bonds which some day must draw him nearer and nearer, and back again, at last. And by and by it came to seem as if this common loss of theirs was after all to be a tie, stronger in its sadness than any fellowship of joy, so deep was Betty's affection for the gentle lost one.

The girl felt a mysterious calm encircle her as she moved about. The little room — Axel's room — where her friend lay sleeping, became like a shrine. There the mother had always been happiest to stay; they felt as if fulfilling her wish in letting her rest there for these last few hours. Axel's lilies were in

bloom at the window. The "Night" medallion, marble witness of his childish slumbers, hung above her head. Betty came with her arms full of green branches, and twined one around the white symbol.

She looked in again before going away, but turned back on the threshold, for Dr. Brand was there, alone. His dark head showed in the evening dusk, motionless on the bedside.

Betty glided silently home through the wet grass, making no sign of grief till she was in her own room. But she sat up late at the window, looking toward the neighboring house; and as she saw the moon silvering the thick vine around one little casement, sobbed softly to think how its pale light touched the carven Night upon the wall, and the no less quiet figures beneath it — one stilled by the blessed touch of Death; the other, by the ruder hand of Life.

"If Axel knew!" she said, turning her pale face up to the night-sky. "Oh Axel, my poor boy!" And she wept and stretched up her hands as if it were conscious of her or of any human sorrow. The dew fell on her forehead soothingly as she knelt thinking of Axel; and when after a while she slept, she went to comfort him in her faithful dreams.

Dr. Brand would not remain in Lyme after the duties of that sad week were over. His friends kept him with them as much as possible. He came and sat in Mr. Karlsen's library, his handsome head already bent and whitening at the temples.

"I am going to my boy," he said, when they ques-

tioned about his plans. "He will be glad to have me with him for a while. Afterwards I shall travel. I could n't stay here, my dear friends, kind as you are to me."

So he went away, and the cottage was taken for summer use by a family of his acquaintance in the city.

Betty's heart ached cruelly many a time, when she saw, in passing, strange faces at the windows, and heard strange voices singing and laughing in the rooms whose dim pleasantness had been sweet to her through so many dreamlike days. It seemed a dreadful thing to see people lounging indifferently on the window-seat where Mrs. Brand's workbasket used to sit, and where she used to look out kindly with her soft brown eyes.

Somebody hung a red curtain at the little ivy-window; and Betty resented it fiercely in secret, remembering Axel's dislike for that color. She had brought home the marble "Night" and had it hung in her music-room; and very often its white disk swelled, quivered and shrank again under her full eyes as she sat alone playing, lost in her music and her thoughts.

In winter and early spring, when the cottage was closed and the strange people away in the city, she used to go over by the short cut and walk about the grounds. There was a sort of woful pleasure in straying around there all alone, while the wind roughly switched the trees about, and the cottage stood stonily in their midst, with its blank shuttered

windows, its close-barred door. It wore, she thought, an air of patient waiting. Betty also knew what it meant to wait, to be patient. She could not see what there was to wait for, but life now looked to her like one long waiting.

"What does it all amount to but that? Everybody waits. There is nothing else in the world," she said to herself, moving slowly homeward, as the chilly gusts pushed her and drove yellow strands of hair around her face, and the dry leaves skipped along with her in a rustling host.

Her mother looked down from an upper window at the slight, wind-driven figure, and smiled; thought of her lost friends, and sighed; and then wondered what comfort the child could find in wandering about the deserted cottage in a raw east-wind.

And so the time passed with her. Year followed year with little change; she had no gayeties nor late hours to bring blue shadows under her eyes; but the sweet Lyme summers tinted her cheeks and the winters brightened her clear glance, always fresh and innocent, like a child's. It was a face over which the years passed lightly, and left little to be read of the sorrows they had brought. Day after day found her busied serenely with her home, her music, and her poor people, asking for no gayer employment, and always holding the Doctor's unfailing letters "the dearest thing in life."

The Doctor was well, and apparently bearing his loss as easily as they could hope. He stayed much in Denmark, and much with his son in England. In

his letters to Mr. Karlsen there was occasional reference to Axel's wife and home — which, strictly speaking, was not a home, but a suite in a hotel. Fredrika preferred such an arrangement; it was also best suited to their manner of life. She was very gay in England; she liked a great deal of stir and excitement, and wanted to be able to rush off with a party of friends at a moment's notice. Dr. Brand spoke of her with great reticence, after one or two somewhat bitter outpourings of his heart upon the subject. The stern contempt with which he had thrust away the memory of Else Oersted was scarcely softened after all those years. It would have been strange if he had been ready with open arms to receive her daughter. Fredrika's frankness and good-humor might have won him in time; but when he looked in her face and saw the unforgotten black eyes of the Oersted his heart recoiled, and turned with an inexpressible longing to the soft gray glance of his Betty in the old home. Fredrika, poor woman, never could understand him, nor the hardness in his eye when it rarely met her own. She was a little afraid of him, and by and by a little resentful that her cheery advances found him so invariably cool and irresponsive. She could not know of the fantastic figure in flame-bright garments that flickered over his mental retina when he sat in her inoffensive presence; nor of the soft mocking voice that echoed hatefully in his ear when she talked to him. Yet he knew that Fredrika was not to blame for her eyes nor for her voice.

Axel, it seemed, had become entirely a man of the world, or at least was leading the life of such. He had made good investments, and needed not to be anxious about his bank-account. He was rich in friends — many of the kind that depend upon the bank-account, also many that would have liked him anyhow, for his own agreeable sake. His official duties were light, and left him much liberty; in short, he was carrying out very well the part of what is commonly called a successful man.

This little panorama of distant life was quite strange and curious to Betty, as she sat in her quiet home looking across the fields, and listened to her mother's reading of the Doctor's words.

"I feel as if I were watching the world through a safe tower-window. How much I have seen of it, mamma, for one who has been so little away from home!" said she.

"Ah, much indeed, my dear," said her mother softly; and both thought in silence of the locked desk which held Christina's clever letters of many years.

Betty hardly realized that it was her Axel — the boy-Axel — of whom all these things were written. She tried to imagine him now, as he must look and move: a great, bearded, fine-mannered, indifferent personage, of whom she might possibly feel afraid; having lost none of the old grace, the old charm, but wearing them now with all worldliness, and perhaps — who knew? — all selfishness. No, that she would not admit; whenever that idea came to her

she put it to flight, and went faithfully back to her old idol, the double image of boy and man; generous, idle, kind-hearted, rather pompous, but always noble and sincere.

"The other Axel is a man in a story," she repeated to herself; "*this* is my Axel;" and she brooded over the image with an infinite fondness that a better man than Axel might have found it hard to merit.

"I am glad he is so far away now," she sometimes thought. "While he is away I have the same right to him as ever; but if we were nearer together — no, I suppose I could not bear to realize how changed his life is — in how different places his lines have fallen! Now I *know* it all, without feeling it."

The veil of distance tempered all news, trifling or important, that came to them across the sea; even the news that certain letters brought in later days, of illness and suspense, of foreboding, and finally the laying-by of hope. And it was Axel's wife about whom their thoughts now revolved, and in whose behalf messages of anxious interest followed each other again and again to England. The Doctor wrote of her now with a kind of careful earnestness, through which a tinge of remorse seemed to creep, as though he inwardly reproached himself with some indifference or coolness for which remorse might come too late.

"I have spoken of her less, and less kindly, than I might," he wrote to Mr. Karlsen. "I always felt that she, as it were, took possession of her place in my family by what I have called manœuvring. But

what I once resented I am willing now to excuse; having read in it the impulse of sincere passion for the one remaining passion of *my* life — the one link between me and the world. Although older than my son, she has ever been most devoted to him; and now, in the shadow of threatened bereavement, I face the consciousness that I have done small justice to her warm, disinterested spirit. I recognize, though not as an excuse, that my feeling toward her has been always qualified by certain disappointed hopes of mine for Axel, of which you, my friend, have long been aware. This was no fault of hers; and I forgive her encroachments the more readily that I foresee a mysterious fate about to lead my son through the experience which was so lately — but so much more cruelly — mine."

The Doctor's foresight proved unerring. Another sad-bordered missive put an end to uncertainty; Axel and his father were alone in the world together.

Mrs. Karlsen read the intelligence to Betty, who said little, though the tears sprang into her eyes as she listened. It was sad, but as unreal as all the rest. Afterwards, as she took a good-night glimpse of the stone cottage, looking cold and forlorn in the dusk, it all came upon her like a flash.

Then she cried pitifully for the poor woman who had been taken away from life, the fair world, and Axel; and she wondered still more pitifully, with her young heart full of honest sorrow, how much he really loved and mourned what he had lost.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RETURN OF THE PRINCE.

IN these days of changes, when sometimes it seemed to Betty that she in her little sphere was standing still, while all the rest of the world was spinning on and spinning away from her, one of her chief comforts was the company of her bright friend Rose.

For Rose remained charming as ever, quite recovered from her severe fright upon the railway. Yet there were some changes to be observed even in her. The bright, frisky audacity of the earlier Rose was much subdued, so that sometimes she appeared almost meek. After the sudden flight of its rector, St. Agatha's had gone through a prolonged agony of substitutes, during which Rose had seceded from the family pew and slipped over to the Baptist congregation. Once Mr. Goodwillie was seen walking home with her after service. It was observed that he was very often at the Harrods', and that they were rather inclined to make a pet of him; which was natural, after his late championship of the young lady. The pummelling which he received on that occasion had not resulted seriously, though it had thrown him

into a fever, during which the whole Harrod family had been unremitting in their attentions. After he was restored to health they continued the attentions; and Mr. Goodwillie, now the lion of the village, became very much at home in the fine Harrod residence.

These things were significant to Betty, but she said nothing. "When Rose has anything to tell me," thought the discreet maiden, "she will tell it." And so she did, one day while the pair were trundling along in her little basket-carriage over a road which they used to follow to the violet-grounds.

"Up there," said Rose, pointing with her whip at a shady clump of trees, "is the spot where you had your first sight of the Reverend Roderic Musgrove! Do you remember?"

"Oh, perfectly well. He had been fishing, and he was whistling something operatic. I hate the thought of him! Yet you used to admire him then, Rose."

"So I did! Yes, I really made quite a hero of him in those times. How are the mighty fallen! Do you remember, when we were small creatures getting violets, how I used to say I should never marry anybody but a hero? Well, my dear, do you know I think I have found a genuine one, this time!"

"Oh, Rose, Rose! You a minister's wife!"

"Oh, Betty, Betty! and such a minister! Don't fancy, my dear, that I am blinded to the facts. I know he is simple and old-fashioned, and a dreadful Baptist, and he does n't know anything about *Tri-*

poses and *Little-goes*, and he is not handsome, and he *is* shabby — and I adore him! Oh, Betty, if you had seen him pick up that awful man by the neck, just like a kitten!"

Betty gave the expected gasp of admiration, and looked sympathetically at her friend.

"Don't you think, I had just been laughing to myself at those horrid scarlet things he wore around his wrists! If I had only known what was inside of them — He never shall wear them again, though; but he shall wear the very nicest fur ones I can get for him, next winter. And he shall not look shabby any more. I never cared so much before about my money as I do now, on his account. Not that he likes it, however. Why, he 's been quite dejected about it, for fear it will make him seem mercenary! I told him that was not a compliment to me; but he does n't know anything about compliments, you see. And I have talked a deal to him of all the benevolent things we can do with my objectionable money, so that now he is getting reconciled."

"And how about papa and mamma? are they reconciled too?" asked Betty, after she had laughed in sympathy. "I can hardly imagine it of Mr. Harrod."

"Mr. Harrod agrees to anything that Miss Harrod proposes! I don't really think, though, that he would have smiled upon it so readily but for the Musgrove muss. That affair upset papa so that he does n't know half the time what he is about. I believe it was in one of those fits of abstraction that

he gave his consent! But he has a great regard for Mr. Goodwillie, ever since that frightful day on the train. Indeed, I don't fancy Mr. Goodwillie would ever have thought of *me* if he had n't found it necessary to knock somebody down in my behalf; and it 's quite certain I never should have thought of him. Dear me! what if anybody had prophesied it to me in those school-girl days? Well, Betty, we don't any of us know what we 're coming to, as Mrs. Ricker says! I dare say you will furnish the next surprise."

"Not immediately, I think," Betty said, smiling. "You need n't feel concerned about me, Mrs. Goodwillie. I 'm very comfortable, thank you!"

"But I *was* sorry that you sent away Jack. Don't be cross, but I used to build air-castles for you. If you had taken Jack it would have been so very nice, and you could have gone about so much!"

"But I don't want to go about. If I were a man I should certainly want to use strong language with regard to Jack — only then it would n't be called for. I have always been so badgered about him!"

"Unkind Betty! You would have pitied him if you had seen his woful looks when he returned from the Water Gap."

"Oh, I think Jack is better now," said Jack's adored, breaking into a laugh. "I heard of his making fearful havoc among the city young ladies, last winter. I hope he will try to be considerate of them."

"Why, then, I 'll waste no more sympathy on

him," said Rose scornfully. "The faithless weather-cock!"

"Oh, no," protested her friend. "I'm sure it's fortunate if one is able to throw off his cares and amuse himself a little. That is all that could be expected — of Jack. And we are all more or less elastic, you know. It has often occurred to me that one of the most humiliating things in our human weakness is the ease with which we forget."

Rose looked at her with a soft intelligence in her smile. "Of all people who are open to that reproach," said she, "I believe you are the one who deserves it least. You will never be humiliated in that way. You are one who does not forget."

"Well, I think you are right," said Betty gently, with an answering smile. "I do not easily forget."

And Rose asked never a question, but thought of some girlish talk, years before, among the wood-violets.

St. Agatha's found a new rector by and by to stand under her mellow lights in the Reverend Roderic's place. But Rose never went back to the family pew as a regular attendant. The fastidious little High Church lady gave up her crosses and altar-work, and her aristocratic whims, and stepped quietly into the post of a "common preacher's" wife. Mr. Harrod built a bird's-nest of a parsonage in the autumn; and Mrs. Goodwillie took her pony-phaeton there, and experienced the greatest delight in driving her husband about instead of letting him tramp through the long parochial walks that he found so important.

Betty often laughed to see them spinning over the road in the "basket," Rose snapping her little ribboned whip triumphantly, and Mr. Goodwillie beaming beside her, younger and cheerier of face than ever. As Rose had promised herself, he never looked shabby any more. He was a happy, prosperous man now, as he deserved; his only complaint being that he was not allowed sufficient exercise on foot, and that his wife's extravagance, where it concerned himself, was quite beyond his power to restrain.

And Betty? Well, the seasons were flying faster and faster over her yellow head, each one tinged with its own peculiar shade of melancholy, which was not sorrow, but only the shadow of old associations. She wished sometimes that the seasons might all melt into one, and spare her the changes that always stirred a painful restlessness within her. And most of all she dreaded the soft indicible sadness of the spring. The chatter of building birds made her dreamy; the fragrance of the early flowers which she often wore brought tears into her eyes. No one saw that; but she used to play her Chopin then as she never could at other times; and her mother, sitting in an upper chamber, listened and wept.

Mr. and Mrs. Karlsen were sent for in May by Aunt Bertha. The poor lady was terribly lonely, and begged for the society of her brother and his wife for a week or two before she went out of town. She had grown unusually fond of them of late years, but had never wanted to visit them since Christina's death. So they went to the city for a week, and Betty was left in solitude with the maids.

She liked that very well, especially in the thoughtful mood which this season induced. The house rang with her plaintive music nearly all day; and Hulda and Maria, stopping their work now and then to listen, would wonder that poor Miss Betty's arms did n't ache dreadfully with so much playing!

Her mother and father had been gone several days. It was very warm, for May, so that she had put on a light frock and thrown open all the windows. After a morning of "ballades" and "reveries" the young mistress of the house had resolved to exchange poetry for prose, and with a bit of sewing-work in her hands, pushed up a little rocker where she could look out across the garden. Prose? oh no, everything was poetry in this sweet May air. The western windows let in showers of glimmering light from between the branches outside. There was such a lovely quiet everywhere; such a far-away shine upon the hills! How, in the midst of this Eden-like freshness and beauty, could any creature send up its cry of weariness or grief? But why, then, must every such shining afternoon bring back a train of other afternoons that had sunk so long ago behind those western hills?

"Oh, Miss Betty, please, you 're sitting right in a most horrid draught!" said Hulda, on her way upstairs.

"I don't care, Hulda. I would n't shut out this delightful air for anything you could mention."

Betty let her head droop against the chair-back, and her hands upon her lap, with a disheartened look. "Mamma said I should be lonely," she

thought. "I told her it was n't possible; but this seems like it."

The stone cottage was in view, across the hall and through the dining-room windows. The old footpath was half effaced under straggling grass, it was so little used in these days. But some one was using it at the very moment, walking on it slowly and trying to clear it with a stick. A large figure, that was in some way familiar, so that Betty straightened up and looked at it piercingly. She would have taken it for Dr. Brand, but it walked with a heavier step, and there was a different poise to its head. A well-known poise! Was she, for a certainty, awake? She went out to the porch, shading her eyes with her hand.

The strange gentleman was bearded, and wore brown travelling-clothes. He looked about him, as he came up under the elms, with very grave and pensive brown eyes. At the flutter of Betty's light draperies upon the steps he paused, looked inquiringly, and raised his hat with a serious smile.

"I believe," said he, "you don't recognize me."

Betty held out her hands. "Yes, I know you," she said. "And I am very glad to see you, Axel."

That ever she should have taken Axel Brand for a stranger!

He came up the steps, and they went into the music-room together. "You knew *me*," she said, "quickly enough."

"Oh," said Axel, "you are just the same. Everything is just the same." His eye wandered around the room, and he drew a long breath. "Everything

about here, I mean. — Your mother and father are well?"

"Oh, I am so sorry! they are away now, for the week. Yes, they are well. Aunt Bertha sent for them, and I am quite alone. I was just beginning to feel a little deserted and dull."

"I am glad to be on hand, then, as a poor restorative," said Axel. "You have n't asked me why I chose to appear so unexpectedly!"

"Why did you? It is a pleasant surprise."

"And I like to surprise people. I wanted to see if you would know me."

"Oh — after a minute," said Betty. "I did not hesitate long, you know."

"But I am very much changed?" he persisted.

"Very much," Betty admitted gravely.

"You will not notice it by and by," said he. "It is because you have not seen me for so long — partly. I am not as anxious now to look venerable as I was once, in my school-days."

Then they talked of the Doctor, who had come as far as the city and would be with them in a day or two; and of Axel's life abroad, his occupations and journeyings, and the probable length of his visit. It was all very simple and serious; each, to the other's mental eye, was wrapped in mourning garments. They touched but lightly on the subject of their losses, though it was all the time present in their minds, and betraying itself in their words.

Axel's eye fell upon the Night medallion; he pointed at it without speaking.

"Yes," said Betty, "I wanted it here. She was very fond of it, always. She slept under it, at the last; and there was myrtle hung around it."

Axel got up and walked about the room, an old restless way of his.

"Oh," said he, pressing his forehead against the window-pane. "I did not think it would seem so much like home to me!"

There was something childish in the exclamation; Betty was very much moved.

"I am happy to know that it does seem so," said she in a low voice. "You *are* at home here, remember, Axel."

She had tea brought into the music-room, so that they might have the last of the sunlight. Hulda, coming with the tea-tray, failed at first to recognize Mr. Axel, and made up for it afterwards by a flood of delighted compliments when he gave her a friendly shake of the hand. Maria the housekeeper, also, found occasion to pass through the hall; and paid her respects to Mr. Axel with a gratified curtsey and chuckle.

Betty drew chairs to the tea-stand, and began to make a hospitable tinkling among the flowered cups that her guest remembered. A thread of pale-blue steam purled up cheerfully from the spout of the little urn; the sunshine danced about over the burnished tea-things.

Axel drew a long, contented sigh as he dropped into his chair. "Yes, it is very much like home," said he, looking thoughtfully at the sunlit head behind the urn.

He sat and talked like one in a dream ; and sometimes grew silent, holding his cup half-empty while his eyes roved away over the fields. Betty felt a rising in her throat as she glanced at the grave, guarded face beside her, and the eyes so heavy with reading the mysteries of Time and Loss. But he brightened a little now and then; and she found that the changes in his face became, as he had said they would, less and less apparent while she watched him. She had by chance a tuft of their familiar wild-flowers in her belt; she saw him look at it with recognition, as at an old friend.

The pleasant country-sounds came to them faintly across their area of silence — lowings and jinglings from the pastures, muffled trundling of home-bound farmers' wagons. It seemed to both that the quiet afternoon had been brought back for them out of old days; and yet, as Betty said to herself, there was no longer anything melancholy in it.

"I will play to you, and celebrate your coming," said she, when the shadows fell and the tray had been carried away.

Axel sank into a low chair by the piano, with his head inclined upon his hand. "Yes," said he, "as you used to do."

And she played for him what she had played so many years before, the "Farewell" Sonata, ending with that triumphant burst of happiness, the "Return."

He gave a little murmur of satisfaction after it, and she could see his eyes sparkling in the shadow.

"Thanks, many thanks, Betty," said he. "It is a welcome, indeed! You play that wonderfully well."

"Oh, there is nothing wonderful about it," said Betty in her heart. "It would be wonderful if I did not play it well. It is the *Return of the Prince;* but that you do not understand, my best-beloved."

They would not have lights brought, but went into the porch when night had fallen. The veil of semi-darkness seemed to remove a slight restraint that each had felt; they talked freely of the experiences which had come to them, and sympathized with each other. Axel referred to his wife, sparingly, and with a certain gentle forbearance that recalled the Doctor's manner. But Betty spoke most of Mrs. Brand; and Axel's voice failed as he tried to thank her for her devotion to the one so deeply loved, so faithfully remembered.

The May moon rose, and dimly lighted the rustling alleys of the garden. It had nearly passed from their sight before Axel brought the long talk to a close.

"It is too late for you to sit here in the night-damp," said he, rising. "I will say good-night and go."

"Go where, Axel? You are not going to leave us to-night? Maria expects you to stay, as a matter of course, and is making her arrangements accordingly."

"I am sorry to disappoint Maria," said Axel, smiling, "but I had a fancy to pass the night in my little old room over there. I have the key, and the peo-

ple have left the rooms all in order. Mine, they tell me, looks much the same."

"Only they have hung a red curtain in it," said Betty. "But you will be here at breakfast in the morning?"

"Oh yes, I will be here." He loitered a few moments longer, leaning against the porch. "What would you have thought," he asked, "if you had seen me coming across in the little path this afternoon, without any warning? Would you have taken it for my ghost?"

"No," said Betty, "but rather for your father's. I did see you coming, and at first I thought of your father."

"Oh, you did," said Axel. "Then the edge was taken from my surprise after all."

"Why no, indeed! it was only protracted — the length of the footpath. The old path is not very well kept now, is it, Axel?"

"No. It is all overgrown." He stood another moment, looking down abstractedly, and filliping a fallen leaf on the step with his walking-stick. "Well," said he soberly. "Good-night." He ran down the steps and looked back at her, and waved his hat in the old boyish fashion. The step with which he went away was lighter than that with which he had come.

"'*Good-night, sweet prince!*'" said Betty, under her breath; and hidden by the porch, she kissed her locked fingers and stretched them laughing toward the vanishing figure. She could laugh now; she did laugh for pure happiness, while she fastened doors

and windows, and went up the stairs like a bird. Where were now all the dulness and lonesomeness? She sat in her room and looked out toward the one light burning redly in its curtained casement. "More than I asked is granted to me," she murmured gratefully. "I never asked for very much, truly. But I am happy now, once for all, even with nothing more. And I would never presume to ask for any greater happiness if only I might have this — if I might always see the light burning so every night, and know that it was lit — by him!"

O foolish, faithful Betty!

It is easy to fancy passion smouldering without end in the dark heart of a rose; but who would ever suspect anything so warm and lasting at the heart of a white "Northern lily?"

CHAPTER XXV.

DAYBREAK!

IF any dreams visited Betty that night — and it is likely they did — their stay must have been brief. She woke very, very early; so early that no bird had yet begun to twitter. Hulda and Maria, as early birds generally as there were about, were still buried in sleep.

But there was no more sleep for their young mistress. A rush of blissful consciousness sprung her eyelids apart, and kept them so. How could the birds keep silent so long, when her heart was already awake and singing in the darkness?

She sprang up and dressed without a candle. The house was too narrow for her; she wanted the free, cool outer air. How beautiful it would be to see the day break now! She slipped downstairs and let herself out on the porch — the blessed porch where the Prince had graciously sat, and even lingered. She went down and stood between the lions, all cold and moist with dew. The lilacs breathed spicily through the dusk. Now a signal twittering was heard; the chip-birds roused themselves, looked down from their airy lodges, and probably wondered at a house-mistress who rose at such unseasonable

hours. And while she listened to their drowsy roll-call, another sound came across the deep stillness. A door opened and shut in the stone cottage, and steps were distinct upon the gravel-walk. Axel's rest had been no less brief, it seemed; for there he was, strolling nearer and nearer, in the old track under the apple-trees.

Betty would have stolen back into the house, but he had raised his head and observed her. So she stayed there, straight and quiet in her white gown; one might have taken her for a statue by the morning twilight. He stopped for an instant, with an intent look; and then, quite as if expecting her there, came on through the dewy grass and stood before her, one foot upon the steps.

"What brings you out so early? Magnetism?" said he, in his natural blithe tone, but with a serious face.

"Very likely. Is that what brings *you* out so early?" returned Betty, nodding serenely from her elevation.

Watching her with fixed eyes through the misty morning, he seemed to have forgotten himself and wandered off into the clouds.

"You should not have come out so soon. You are not awake yet! Rouse up, dreamer!" she said with a laugh, shaking down a shower of wet lilac-blooms upon them both.

"Yes, I *am* awake, at last," he returned, with sudden energy. "I have just found out what I came for — away over the ocean. I hardly knew at first, but I know now."

A look like sunrise crept into Betty's face; unimagined fires lit up suddenly in her soft gray eyes, as she smiled down upon him, and waited.

"I came to look for something I left behind me once — it must have been a great many years ago, Betty. What was it, do you guess?"

Betty guessed, studying the sky with mischievous and shining eyes — "Not a heart, was it?" She was so sure, now, what he would say.

"Yes! *My* heart," Axel said earnestly. The little hand that welcomed him last night with those jubilant chords was resting on the old stone lion's crinkled mane; he laid his face down upon it in quick emotion. "And here I find it, at last," he went on. "Shall I ask for it back? Will you let me have it back, Betty?"

"No, for I want it myself," Betty answered laughing. "But I will keep you with it if you like."

"Do you know," Axel added after a little silence, "I think I must have left it here about twenty years since, as nearly as I can judge."

"Twenty years! And you have done without it all that time? What a useful article it must be!" said Betty with a sly and happy glance.

"But I could not have done a better thing with it, you 'll admit," he retorted, bending his face again over the avaricious little hand. She made no dissent to that, but dropped the other hand upon his brown hair and played with it lightly.

"A gray streak!" she exclaimed, her eyes resting

on it meditatively. "And another! Quite a powdering of gray — on a boy's head, too! You are always a boy to me, you know. Have you forgotten our old story, Axel, about the Prince who rode out into the world and stayed until his hair was gray? You are the Prince. You always were the Prince, to me."

"Then," said he, with his old buoyancy, "*you* are the Princess Faithful! And that you surely are, my lady. Have I not laid my shield at your feet, at last?"

"Well," she conceded with a merry shrug. "Yes, I am the Princess Faithful — since you are the Prince." And by and by, after a long pause wherein her thoughts seemed to have flown back to some remote point, she said, breaking into a sudden ecstatic laugh — "I was dreadfully jealous of Flora Tompkins, did you know it?"

"Jealous of *whom*, did you say?" inquired Axel, looking up with combined indignation and perplexity.

"Of course, you don't remember," she said, slipping the hand under his arm, and leaning on it joyously. "But I do. I remember everything. Every little thing! See here, Axel — these lions are old friends of ours, are n't they? We played with them when we were little children. I was always fond of them; they used to seem alive to me. But they are made of granite — 'firm and enduring,' are they not?"

"'Firm and enduring' — yes."

"But I know of something else that is firm and

enduring — that has lived as long, almost, as the lions, and will far, far outlast them — into the ages of ages, my Axel! Your turn now. Guess that riddle, traveller!"

Ah — he knew the answer well enough; and his brown eyes filled with tears — of self-reproach partly; and of humility, perhaps; and of joy above all.

"Look, look!" she cried, pointing him eagerly to the east. "The sunrise at last! What a magnificent sight!"

Yes, the sun was coming up, and childhood came airily back with it; all the world was rosy and twinkling for happiness. Larks shot up into the blooming sky; a fresh wind rose and wrestled with the elm-branches. There were whole heavens of content in the gurgling dove-notes on the roof.

"It is worth the waiting twenty years for such a daybreak as this! Ah," said Betty, gazing unspeakable things into that radiant distance, "now, surely, I understand for the first time how the Fire-worshippers must feel!"

"So do I," said Axel, in a lower voice.

But he was not looking for his fires in the east; only at their nearer glow in the depths of two wide, enchanted gray eyes.

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